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**Intercultural communication: the perceptions of  
university students learning Chinese as a foreign  
language in China**

**Zhaoyi Liu**

**Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Education**



**School of Education**

**Durham University**

**June 2019**

## **Abstract**

This study investigates the ways learners of Chinese as a foreign language experience intercultural communication in China. The Chinese context and diversity of participants' linguistic and cultural backgrounds have provided a unique setting while filling a gap in the research around intercultural experience in a Chinese university setting. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, aiming to understand participants' perceptions of intercultural communicative competence and identity.

This study found that participants were motivated to study Chinese and to engage in intercultural communication through their desire to improve career prospects and/or to integrate into the host Chinese community. These motivations developed, interacted and changed over time as documented in this thesis. Four main challenges arising from intercultural communication emerged from the study are: language issues, unfamiliarity with cultural practices, nonverbal communication and stereotypes. According to participants' accounts, the success of intercultural communication and the development of intercultural communicative competence were influenced by their willingness to communicate and motivation, attitudes towards intercultural communication, language proficiency and the skill of discovery. Participants experienced intercultural communication as a process of negotiation and transformation in identity, during which they moved from positioning themselves or being positioned as an 'outsider' to gradually becoming an 'insider'. This change was significantly influenced by their developing intercultural communicative competence.

By focusing on the experiences and perceptions of this under-researched group, international students of Chinese as a foreign language in China, this study contributes to the literature on intercultural communication and offers practical implications for educational institutions, foreign language education, and individuals in the context of China.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Table of Contents .....	ii
List of Illustrations .....	vi
Abbreviations .....	vii
Declaration .....	viii
Statement of Copyright .....	ix
Acknowledgement.....	x
Dedication .....	xi
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Research background .....	1
1.2 Purpose of the study .....	5
1.3 Significance of the study .....	6
1.4 Definitions of key terms.....	8
1.5 Structure of the thesis.....	10
Chapter 2 Literature Review .....	13
2.1 Intercultural competence in foreign language teaching and learning .....	14
2.1.1 Definitions of ‘culture’ in foreign language teaching and learning ....	15
2.1.2 Relationship between language and culture .....	19
2.1.3 The cultural and intercultural dimensions of foreign language teaching and learning.....	21
2.1.4 Developing intercultural competence in Chinese as a foreign language teaching and learning .....	24
2.1.5 Study abroad .....	27
2.2 Understanding of intercultural communicative competence.....	33
2.2.1 Conceptualisation of intercultural competence.....	34
2.2.2 Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence.....	36
2.3 Identity .....	51
2.3.1 Identity in intercultural communication.....	51
2.3.2 Cultural identity .....	53

## Table of Contents

---

2.3.3 Identity theories.....	55
2.4 Formulation of research questions .....	64
2.5 Chapter summary .....	67
Chapter 3 Research Methodology .....	69
3.1 Introduction .....	69
3.2 Research paradigm .....	69
3.3 Rationale for a phenomenological approach.....	71
3.4 Researching multilingually .....	75
3.5 Data Collection instrument and procedure.....	78
3.5.1 In-depth semi-structured interview .....	78
3.5.2 Interview schedule and Pilot study .....	80
3.5.3 Access to the field .....	83
3.5.4 Sampling .....	84
3.5.5 Interview Process .....	88
3.5.6 Language issues in the interview .....	92
3.6 Data analysis .....	93
3.6.1 Rationale for adopting a thematic analysis method .....	93
3.6.2 Data analysis process .....	95
3.7 Reflexivity.....	104
3.8 Ethical consideration.....	109
3.8.1 Informed consent.....	110
3.8.2 Confidentiality and anonymity.....	111
3.8.3 Avoiding discomfort and giving voice .....	112
3.9 Trustworthiness of the study .....	113
3.9.1 Credibility .....	114
3.9.2 Transferability, dependability and conformability .....	114
3.10 Chapter summary .....	116
3.11 Linking to research findings.....	116
Chapter 4 Participants' Experience of Intercultural Communication in the Context of China .....	119
4.1 Introduction.....	119
4.2 Participants' motivation towards intercultural communication .....	119
4.2.1 Career prospects in instrumental motivation.....	120

## Table of Contents

---

4.2.2 Integrative motivation .....	123
4.2.3 Change of motivation .....	126
4.3 Language issues .....	130
4.4 Unfamiliarity with the cultural practices.....	134
4.5 Nonverbal communication .....	142
4.6 Stereotypes .....	145
4.6.1 The formation of stereotypes .....	146
4.6.2 Elements shaping stereotypes .....	151
4.6.3 Problems of stereotypes .....	154
4.7 Chapter Summary.....	156
Chapter 5 Participants' Perceptions of Intercultural Communicative Competence..	160
5.1 Willingness to communicate and motivation .....	160
5.2 Attitudes towards intercultural communication .....	166
5.2.1 Openness .....	166
5.2.2 Respect .....	170
5.2.3 Readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment.....	172
5.2.4 入乡随俗.....	175
5.3 Language proficiency.....	178
5.3.1 The development of language proficiency inside classrooms.....	178
5.3.2 The development of language proficiency outside classrooms.....	184
5.4 The skill of discovery.....	189
5.5 Chapter summary .....	194
Chapter 6 The Process of Changing Identity through Intercultural Communication	197
6.1 Identity as an outsider .....	197
6.1.1 Physical appearance .....	198
6.1.2 The lack of language proficiency .....	201
6.1.3 Participation in intercultural communication.....	204
6.2 The change of identity.....	208
6.3 Re-entry: experiencing the impact of identity change .....	218
6.4 Chapter summary .....	223
Chapter 7 Conclusion.....	226
7.1 Introduction.....	226
7.2 Summary of main research findings .....	226

## Table of Contents

---

7.3 Contributions to the field of intercultural communicative competence.....	235
7.4 Implications of the study.....	243
7.4.1 Implications for prospective international students .....	244
7.4.2 Implications for Chinese higher educational institutions and staff...246	
7.4.3 Implications for Chinese as a foreign language teaching.....	248
7.5 Limitations of the study .....	251
7.6 Direction for further research.....	255
7.7 Conclusion to the study.....	257
Appendices.....	259
Appendix 1 Byram's (1997) <i>savoirs</i> for developing ICC (p. 57-64) .....	259
Appendix 2 Participant Information Sheet (English).....	267
Appendix 3 Participant Information Sheet (Chinese) .....	269
Appendix 4 Declaration of Informed Consent (English).....	270
Appendix 5 Declaration of Informed Consent (Chinese) .....	271
Appendix 6 Participants' Bio-Data (参与者详细资料).....	272
Appendix 7 Pilot Interview Guide (English) .....	273
Appendix 8 Pilot Interview Guide (Chinese).....	275
Appendix 9 Interview Guide (English).....	277
Appendix 10 Interview Guide (Chinese) .....	279
Appendix 11 An Example of Coding in NVivo .....	281
Appendix 12 An Example of Coded Transcript (Excerpt).....	282
Appendix 13 Interview Transcript .....	285
References .....	304

## List of Illustrations

### List of Tables

Table 1. Factors in intercultural communication.....	42
Table 2. Profiles of the participant group.....	87

### List of Figures

Figure 1. The Cultural Iceberg .....	16
Figure 2. Byram's model of ICC .....	41
Figure 3. Framework for researching multilingually .....	76
Figure 4. List of categories.....	104
Figure 5. Relationships among motivation, WTC and related factors.....	162
Figure 6. Main findings of this study .....	228
Figure 7. Comparison between participants' perceptions of ICC and Byram's ICC model .....	238

## Abbreviations

CFL	Chinese as a Foreign Language
CFLTL	Chinese as a Foreign Language Teaching and Learning
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
FL	Foreign Language
FLL	Foreign Language Learning
FLT	Foreign Language Teaching
FLTL	Foreign Language Teaching and Learning
IC	Intercultural Communication
ICC	Intercultural Communicative Competence
INT	Identity Negotiation Theory
L2	Second Language
NNS	Non-native Speaker
NS	Native Speaker
SIT	Social Identity Theory
TA	Thematic Analysis
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and no part of the material contained in the thesis has previously been submitted for any other degree or qualification in this or any other institution.

## **Statement of Copyright**

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotations from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

## **Acknowledgement**

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## **Dedication**

*This thesis is dedicated to my beloved parents for their  
love, endless support and encouragement.*

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

There is a long tradition of research exploring intercultural communication (IC) that has centred on English as a foreign language (EFL). In recent years, studies in this field have been expanding. Building on knowledge developed from previous research, this study focuses on Mandarin Chinese (referred to as ‘Chinese’ hereafter), aiming to explore Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) learners’ IC experience in China and how they make sense of their experience. Drawing on Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as the main theoretical framework, whilst also drawing on other relevant theories, this study seeks to shed light on the determinants that influence IC, participants’ perceptions of what contributes to successful IC, and their perceptions of themselves and positioning in order to add to the existing understanding of ICC.

This chapter begins with an introduction to the background of the study. Then it outlines the purpose and the significance of the study, and concludes with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

### **1.1 Research background**

During recent decades, throughout the rise of China’s economic, political and cultural importance, and an explosion in global commercial and cultural exchanges as encouraged by the accelerating internationalisation, the Chinese language is growing in significance. For this reason, we have seen huge growth in numbers of people from

numerous foreign countries who are learning CFL (Duff, 2008). More recently, following an increased willingness to pursue personal development and efforts made by China's Ministry of Education (MOE) who offer scholarships to international students (CUCAS,<sup>1</sup> 2012), more people are opting for China as their study abroad destination, which presents many opportunities for an intercultural experience.

Accordingly, increasing attention has been paid to CFL education and flourishing student mobility, which has seeded an increasing research field in intercultural competence. Since the 1980s, the objective of foreign language teaching and learning (FLTL) has been changing to intercultural competence, which calls for a development in FL learners' skills and critical thinking about cultures in preparation for IC. In response to this change, an intercultural perspective is now encouraged to be integrated into FLTL (Alred, Byram, & Fleming, 2003; Byram, 1997). Despite educators having already reached agreement on including an intercultural perspective into FLTL, there seems to be a disconnection between academics and practitioners. FL teachers are hesitant to integrate intercultural theories into pedagogical practices; indeed, developing intercultural skills remains lagging in language teaching, which may influence a learner's understanding and development of intercultural competence and further influence their IC experience (Byram, 2009; Cushner & Mahon, 2009). The intercultural perspective in CFL education and its implementation is a relatively new trend and under development. The limited research mainly focuses on providing an introduction to intercultural communication (Hu, 1999; Lin & Xie, 2005) or

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<sup>1</sup> CUCAS: China's University and College Admission System

discussing the importance of involving intercultural competence in CFL education or dealing with intercultural teaching in CFL teaching (Bi, 2009; Peng, 2007).

Moreover, the rising trend of student mobility in the global educational arena has generated numerous theories and research studies on FLTL, intercultural competence and intercultural experience of international students abroad (Byram, 1997; Kinginger, 2013; Ting-Toomey, 2005). Though a number of stakeholders, for instance, educational institutions, governments and researchers, have been working on issues surrounding IC and intercultural involvement aiming to foster a deeper understanding and further development of intercultural competence; these studies have tended to be of a Euro-centric orientation for some time. The majority of prior studies that investigate international students' complex intercultural experience focus on EFL learners in foreign countries (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, the US, the UK) and comparatively little empirical research has been conducted relating to CFL learners in a Chinese setting.

Given little is known about CFL learners' IC experience, to capture diverse IC experience and understandings of intercultural competence, this empirical research is conducted from a relatively new perspective — CFL learners, expecting to gain valuable information and resources in this field. Moreover, based on the assumption that intercultural experience is directly reflected in learners' intercultural competence developed through intercultural teaching in CFL education, instead of focusing on formal language teaching inside the classroom, which has attracted a lot of research,

this study concentrates on CFL learners' personal intercultural experience to gain a comprehensive understanding of their IC experience and perceptions of intercultural competence.

This study initially stemmed from my academic interest and personal experience. When reviewing the relevant literature on intercultural communication and intercultural competence, it is notable that studies of international students in English-speaking countries are abundant, while the area of international students in China is under-researched. After meeting with a CFL learner in a language exchange programme and hearing about her experience in China, I started to wonder about the status quo of CFL education and individuals' intercultural experience in China, which prompted my research interest in this area.

The significance of intercultural competence struck me significantly when reflecting on my personal experience. As an international student, I encountered similar issues in IC as other international students did. In the first year of my doctoral study, I took the 'Intercultural Communication' course and was surprised to find that the issues to emerge in my personal IC experience related to, and could be explained by, some intercultural theories, which further provoked my thoughts. The course not only formed my knowledge base, but alongside with my personal experience, it stimulated my interest in this field.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

Along with the growth in CFL learners and inbound international students in China, it is high time for more studies to emerge from the field of CFL. However, as discussed in the aforementioned research background and problems, CFL learners' IC experience in the context of China is under-explored. The principal objective for this study is to explore CFL learners' IC experience based on participants' reflections and self-reporting, whereby participants critically evaluate their IC experience.

This study places CFL learners' IC experience at the centre because relative previous studies have highlighted the contribution of a better understanding of learners' IC experience inside and outside the classroom, which is conducive for the optimisation of intercultural education and IC between students from foreign and host cultures (Qin, 2014). Based on learners' IC experience, researchers have identified a number of determining factors that impact the levels of FL learners' personal and intercultural development (Dalib, Harun, & Yusoff, 2014; Liu, 2016). Moreover, studies on students' experience also uncover a link between IC and identity, which is associated with intercultural competence (Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010; Noels, Yashima, & Zhang, 2012). In this sense, this study aims to construct an understanding of intercultural competence and identity, forming a crucial impetus for conceptualising and enriching current knowledge on intercultural competence.

As mentioned in section 1.1, intercultural competence has become a central objective of FLT and an emerging focus of international higher education. Accordingly, it has

assumed increasing importance in evaluating FLT and the capacity of higher educational institutions in preparing global-ready graduates, and may further indicate the internationalisation of higher educational institutions (Deardorff, 2006). As another purpose, this study hopes to offer FL learners, international students and FL educators an in-depth understanding of intercultural competence and to provide some valuable views uncovering students' needs to enhance the awareness of institutions to enhance the satisfaction of students' intercultural and study abroad experience.

### **1.3 Significance of the study**

The research context and participants' background along with the engagement of IC with host nationals during their overseas study ensures an original contribution to the literature regarding the diversity of intercultural experience and understandings; this study fills a conspicuous research gap. This study investigates the phenomenon of IC through the lens of CFL learners. Based on detailed descriptions of international CFL learners' experience of IC in which they have engaged, it is possible to understand what is perceived to contribute to IC and how identities are developed or changed throughout this process, which forms students' perceptions of intercultural competence and identity. The significance of undertaking this research lies in its prospective contributions to the educational and research aspects of CFL teaching and learning.

First, CFL is a relatively new research area in the field of intercultural competence. Previous empirical research has concentrated more on the EFL context, and teachers'

perceptions and classroom practices (Georgiou, 2011; Hismanoglu, 2011), and the overview of studies conducted in Chinese context show that few studies have focused on CFL learners' IC experience or learners' perspectives. In this sense, this study is crucial in gaining insights into the CFL context.

Second, through the exploration of CFL learners' IC experience, the challenges they encountered and the perceptions of intercultural competence developed along with their own development of intercultural competence, this study attempts to reveal hidden communicative problems, which is important and valuable to improve students' awareness of IC and intercultural competence.

Third, a sound understanding of CFL learners' IC experience and the issues to emerge from the process in particular may be important in improving the quality of CFL education with a view of fostering learners' intercultural competence. Accordingly, increased knowledge gained from students' perspectives from this study may provide added significance in enhancing awareness of the necessities of intercultural language teaching, and is demanded in improving CFL teaching practices and the quality of intercultural teaching.

Forth, CFL learners, on the other hand, are international students in China, therefore it is envisaged that this study could provide some important implications for yielding a sound understanding of international students' intercultural experiences, particular needs and their self-positioning as influenced by IC, which forms the basis of improving students' intercultural competence and intercultural education. This study

also has important implications for implementing activities or practices to promote international students' intercultural integration from an institutional perspective.

Finally, in addition to the aforementioned practical implications at the personal and educational level, this study expects to make some theoretical contributions. Given that it is difficult to arrive at a consensus definition of intercultural competence, exploring in detail students' understandings and perceptions of intercultural competence based on their IC experience in this study seems to be fruitful and valuable in identifying perceived determining elements and understanding of intercultural competence, which provides a conceptualisation of intercultural competence from the perspective of the CFL learner. The definition or identified factors can be used as guidance for intercultural teaching and the self-assessment grid.

### **1.4 Definitions of key terms**

#### **Intercultural Communication**

To understand intercultural communication is important in order to understand the core element 'inter-'. 'Inter-' comes from the Latin word meaning 'between', therefore 'intercultural' refers to what happens when two (or more) culturally different groups come together. The concept of the 'in-between' position while facing different cultures and one's own is, according to Bhabha (1994), the 'third space'. It is in this space that people can view differences, mediate and articulate their own voice or thinking.

IC is simply defined as the ‘exchange of information between individuals who are unlike culturally’ (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999, p. 1). Scholars, e.g. Holliday (1999), criticised the static notion of culture and cultural groups, which indicate ‘culture as nation’ and provides a more flexible conceptualisation of culture (see section 2.1.1 in detail). IC therefore is understood as ‘interpersonal communication between individuals or groups who are affiliated with different cultural groups and/or have been socialised in different cultural (and, in most cases, linguistic) environments’ (Jackson, 2014, p. 3). In this study, IC specifically refers to interactions between CFL learners and native Chinese speakers. Determining how IC can be mutually beneficial entails a look into intercultural competence.

### **Intercultural Competence**

Here a lack of definition consensus also stands among scholars and administrators. Deardorff (2006) upholds that Byram’s definition of intercultural competence is highly suitable for pedagogical purposes with a specific focus on FLT. The most appropriate definition to spring from the literature is ‘Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others’ values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one’s self. Linguistic competence plays a key role’ (Byram, 1997, p. 34). This current study adopts Byram’s conception of intercultural competence for investigating and analysing CFL learners’ IC experience as being influenced by, and a result of, intercultural language teaching.

### **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

This opening chapter has delineated the background of this study and listed the research problem to provide a rationale for selecting the particular research focus. It also discussed the purpose of this study and highlighted the significance of the present study. To conclude, an outline of the thesis is provided.

This thesis consists of a further seven chapters, summarised as follows:

Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature and places the study within its theoretical framework. Firstly, section 2.1 reviews the literature relating to intercultural competence in the field of FLTL, including the conceptualisation of culture, the relationship between language and culture, intercultural teaching in FLTL, and a discussion of the current situation of CFL education in relation to intercultural competence. Moving on to a critical discussion of concepts and theoretical frameworks with regard to intercultural communicative competence (ICC), section 2.2 examines different ways of conceptualising ICC and discusses the theoretical framework applied in this study — Byram’s ICC model, and critiques are identified and discussed. Section 2.3 provides a review concerning identity-related concepts and theories in IC to understand students’ perception of identity. Informed by this review of concepts, theories and previous research, the areas that have been under-explored in the existing literature to emerge are evaluated, based on which, three research questions are presented.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology and methods used to address the research questions. It begins with a rationale for adopting a social constructivist paradigm and a phenomenological approach, and discusses issues related to researching multilingually. Next it provides with a detailed description and discussion of semi-structured interview as a data collection instrument and its procedures. This chapter also presents the rationale for adopting a thematic analysis approach and outlines the data analysis process, followed by a discussion of issues concerning reflexivity, ethical considerations and research trustworthiness.

Chapter 4, 5, and 6 together present the research findings and discussions of the collected data. Along with a critical discussion, the research findings are framed in response to the research questions. Chapter 4 presents the results and analyses of data relating to participants' IC experience. Coming from a different cultural and linguistic background, students undoubtedly encountered some challenges when interacting with culturally different others; a number of issues are identified to influence IC. Moreover, drawing on Byram's ICC model, Chapter 5 presents findings on the understandings and perceptions of ICC based on students' interactions with native Chinese speakers. Four main aspects are identified as important in achieving successful IC, which are central to ICC. Chapter 6 presents the findings on identity in relation to ICC. It explores participants' understanding of themselves and their positioning in an intercultural context, and discusses changes to their sense of identity,

which also reflects the ICC development. Moreover, how reconstructed identities influence participants' lives is also discussed.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes this research by outlining the main research findings, the main contributions to knowledge and understanding in the field of ICC and CFL education. Moreover, it discusses the practical and educational implications offered by this study. Lastly, limitations of the study are illustrated, offering recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

As introduced in Chapter 1, the main research objectives of this study are:

- (1) To understand CFL learners' intercultural communication experience in China;
- (2) To understand how CFL learners understand intercultural communicative competence in relation to their experience;
- (3) To understand how CFL learners understand their identities and how these identities are transformed and developed during IC.

In order to provide a theoretical base for the research objectives, relevant literature has been reviewed. Three major areas of the literature are reviewed in this chapter, including intercultural competence in foreign language teaching and learning, understanding of intercultural communicative competence and identity.

It is believed that CFL learners' ICC, which can be developed through intercultural language teaching in CFL education, significantly impacts their IC experience and understanding of ICC and their changing identity. This chapter begins by discussing intercultural competence as a fundamental objective in FLTL, specifically illustrating the concept of culture in FLTL, the relationship between language and culture, the cultural and intercultural dimensions of FLTL, and the development of intercultural competence as a key objective of CFL education (section 2.1). The next section elaborates the theoretical concept of intercultural competence (or intercultural

communicative competence). It also presents a rationale for adopting Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence as the theoretical framework of this study, a detailed analysis of its 5 *savoirs*, and a discussion of critiques of the model (section 2.2). Subsequently, identity is discussed in relation to intercultural communication as it occupies an important role in the context of IC and studying abroad. Social identity and identity negotiation theory, which influence how identity issues are considered, are then reviewed (section 2.3). The last section concludes, noting the finalised research questions (section 2.4).

### **2.1 Intercultural competence in foreign language teaching and learning**

One of the most significant changes in FLTL over recent decades is that central objectives are no longer solely restricted to the acquisition of linguistic competence, but include intercultural competence, aiming to develop learners' ability to communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural worlds (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993; Lázár, 2007; Sercu et al., 2005). Researchers, such as Byram (1997) and Kramsch (1993, 1995), propose incorporating a cultural dimension into FLTL to foster the development of intercultural competence.

As indicated by Kramsch (1993), FL learners inevitably become learners of a target culture, and similarly, Valdes (1986) maintains that learning an FL is intrinsically bound to cultural learning. Holme (2003) claims that knowledge of a target language culture is essential to fully understand the nuances of meaning within languages. From this point of view, to some extent, foreign language learning (FLL) is

understood as communication between different cultures, emphasising the culture while learning the language. Given that culture is the central theme of intercultural competence, CFL learners' understanding of it exerts its influence on IC. This section starts with a discussion of the ways in which the concept of culture has been understood in FLTL.

### **2.1.1 Definitions of 'culture' in foreign language teaching and learning**

Culture is a highly complex phenomenon and is notoriously difficult to define. Numerous attempts have been made to conceptualise culture. These contrasting and conflicting views create challenges for FL teachers as it is not possible to provide them with simple guidance on the way in which culture should be integrated into FLT. One important concept of culture relating to this study is the cultural iceberg analogy (Weaver, 1993). This is seen as an effective introduction to the complexity of culture because of its visual representation and simplicity. It helps learners to conceptualise the elements of culture and to distinguish between visible parts, and even those so ingrained that members of a culture may not be aware of them.

'Visible-invisible' and 'Big C-little/small c' culture are perhaps the most common dichotomies used to label the cultural iceberg. As shown in Figure 1, Weaver's iceberg model of culture consists of two parts. The visible part above water level indicates differences readily seen, heard, tasted and touched when entering a new culture, while the invisible part below the water shows aspects of culture that consist of values and beliefs, i.e. not readily visible. This model implies that a large

proportion of culturally shaped perceptions are invisible and unconsciously applied in everyday interactions.

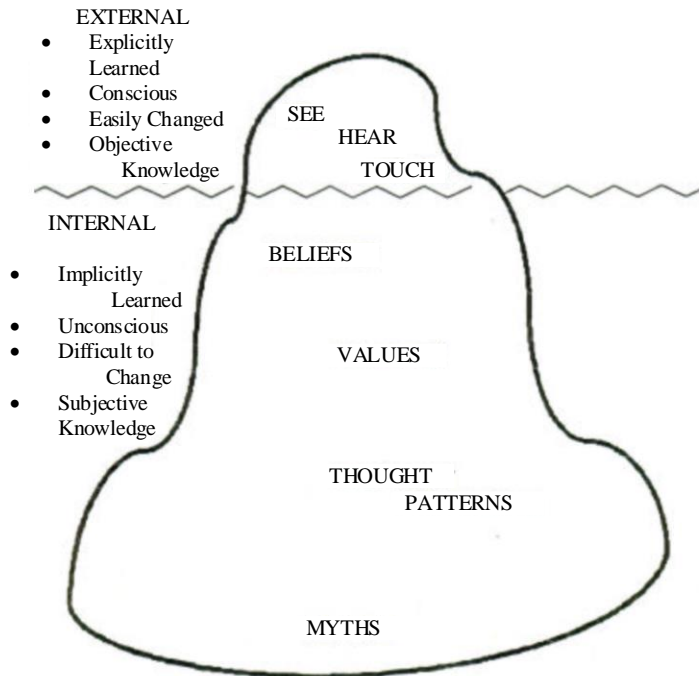


Figure 1. The Cultural Iceberg (Weaver, 1993)

For most FL teachers, culture is ‘associated with the context in which the language is lived and spoken by its native speakers, themselves seen as a more or less homogenous national community with age-old institutions, customs and way of life’ (Kramsch, 2010, p. 276). Culture in FLTL is generally categorised into two distinct groups: Big ‘C’ culture and little ‘c’ culture (Kramsch, 2010; Lee, 2009). Big ‘C’ culture means ‘a set of facts and statistics relating to the arts, history, geography, business, education, festivals and customs of a target speech society’ (Lee, 2009, p. 78). This represents a general humanistic fund of wisdom that has been promoted by nations and their educational institutions to embed a target language to assure the

continuity of a national community (Kramersch, 2010, 2013) .

Little ‘c’ culture, on the other hand, embraces elements that are less visible and less tangible. These cover beliefs, attitudes, native speakers’ ways of behaving, dwelling, their customs, and so on. (Kramersch, 2010, 2013). Little ‘c’ culture is expressed through language and cultural behaviours, and sociolinguistic appropriateness of language use, thus affects one’s acceptance in the host community (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). Bennett (1998) considers that an understanding of objective cultural knowledge (Big ‘C’) does not generate cultural competence. He highlights that understanding learned and shared patterns of values, beliefs, and behaviours (little/small ‘c’) of people who are interacting, contribute to IC. With its focus on communication in social contexts and developing learners’ intercultural competence, the most relevant concept of culture has been little/small ‘c’ in FLTL since the 1980s (Holliday, 1999; Kramersch, 2013).

Bennett (1997) argues towards an understanding of the cultural dimension of language to avoid becoming ‘a fluent fool’ (p. 16), referring to someone who speaks a FL well but fails to understand the social or philosophical content of the language. In this sense, language does not simply serve as a tool of communication, but rather a system of representing, perceiving and thinking. The conceptualisation of culture suggests that language education includes cultural elements to ‘cover much more than the traditional list of compulsory facts about the civilization’ (Lázár, 2007, p. 8). FL learners today are concerned with hidden little ‘c’ cultural aspects perceived to be

essential for IC, including knowledge of everyday life, routines and habits of the target culture, and the interpretation of other cultural and social practices, which influence people's way of thinking and behaving (Chlopek, 2008).

However, the changing characteristics of culture is not explicit in the cultural iceberg analogy in which 'the idea of culture is a 'thing' that people 'have' which can be described, delineated and distinguished between different groups of people' (Baker, 2015, p. 51). This static view and the reification of culture is an essentialist understanding that relates to 'essential differences between ethnic, national and international entities' (Holliday, 1999, p. 240). This portrays a culture as a homogeneous group, which leads to stereotypes and defining and constraining individuals' behaviours entirely by their culture. In an essentialist perspective, cultural identity that links to belonging to a fixed culture, remains a single fixed identity.

The essentialist view of culture has been criticised for overlooking the diversity within a culture as it is constantly evolving through dynamic interactions within a changing environment (Bennett, 2013). According to Savignon and Sysoyev (2005), 'cultures are never static' (p. 36). Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Mompoin-Gaillard and Philippou (2014) clarify the changing characteristics of culture as follows:

*All cultures are dynamic and constantly change over time as a result of political, economic and historical events and developments, and as a result of interactions with and influences from other cultures. Cultures also change over time because of their members' internal contestation of the meanings, norms, values and practices of the group. (p. 15)*

This non-essentialist perspective highlights the fluid and dynamic of culture, indicating that cultural identities are not fixed, but flexible, negotiable and continually changing constantly (Barrett et al., 2014; Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010). This perspective is adopted in the current study.

### **2.1.2 Relationship between language and culture**

Since the emphasis on integrating culture into FLTL, a large number of linguists have been engaged in exploring the relationship between culture and language, as this is important for learners and all involved in language education (see Elmes, 2013; Risager, 2006). ‘Language’ and ‘culture’ are by no means the same; however, they are so closely interwoven and complementary, neither can survive without the other (Brown, 1994; Fishman, 1991).

Risager (2007) points out that the underlying idea regarding the relationship between language and culture is that languages spread across cultures and vice versa. She developed a concept of ‘linguacultural’, indicating the ‘close connection, an interdependence, a complex relationship between language and culture’ (Risager, 2007, p.163). Language, in a broad sense, refers to the symbolic representation of an individual with one’s historical and cultural background, ideas, approach to life, ways of living and thinking, through which culture is transmitted from generation to generation (Jiang, 2010). Without language, culture cannot be acknowledged. Moreover, as the container and carrier of culture, language enables one to participate in a culture, to describe and interpret it, and to respond people within that culture (Liu,

2013; Moran, 2001). Language offers the possibility to learn from cumulative experience because one cannot transmit information, knowledge, experiences and emotions to culturally different others without language (Haviland et al., 2007). Wardhaugh (2002) claims that language structure determines how its speakers view the world, or as a weaker view, even though it does not determine one's worldview, it is influential in predisposing its speakers to adopt their worldview. This inextricable relationship indicates that it is impossible to appreciate or understand one without knowledge of the other. In addition, individuals' perceptions of the world are constructed culturally and socially via meaning expressions, and these are shared by a community and communally negotiated. In other words, language constructs culture. Referring to the aforementioned metaphor of the cultural iceberg, this clearly demonstrates the relationship between language and culture. Language, as the visible part standing out above the sea surface iceberg, is a small part of Big 'C' culture.

On the other hand, culture exerts great influence on language; it shapes language and is reflected in it. Without culture, language is empty and meaningless. According to Lantolf (1999), 'the entities designated by the same word in one culture are not necessarily the entities labeled by a corresponding word (assuming a corresponding word even exists) in another culture' (p. 33). As suggested, language as the most central and essential part of any culture, has always carried it and could never be 'culture-free' (Brooks, 1964). Therefore, knowledge only of linguistic forms cannot guarantee IC. An increasing awareness in FLTL pertains that language can rarely be

taught without including the culture of the target language. A number of scholars (e.g. Byram et al., 1994; Fenner, 2006; Risager, 2007) advocate this integrated view of language and culture, and recognise that FL teaching cannot be separated from the teaching of culture.

Examining this relationship between language and culture is meaningful for investigating the cultural and intercultural dimensions of foreign language teaching, as discussed in the following section.

### **2.1.3 The cultural and intercultural dimensions of foreign language teaching and learning**

Given that an inseparable relationship between language and culture is widely accepted, further explorations into the cultural dimensions within FLTL have been made. Extensive study has been conducted by Byram (1989), highlighting the need to stress the interrelationships between language and culture, maintaining that culture needs to be made explicit rather than taken for granted. Traditionally, language is viewed as a communicative tool consisting of words describing a reality and objects. However, these words are meaningful only when situated in a cultural context (Byram & Kramsch, 2008; Byram, 1988). Including a cultural dimension in FLTL, therefore, is believed to contribute to learners' engagement in realistic language situations (Byram & Feng, 2004; Shahriar & Syed, 2017).

According to the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (NSFLEP, 1999), ‘the true content of the foreign language course is not the grammar and the vocabulary of the language, but the cultures expressed through that language’ (p. 43). The language proficiency that lies at the heart of FL studies is not the only aim, there are also certain features and characteristics of the culture to be learned (NSFLEP, 1999). Given both language and culture carry meanings, learners need to understand culturally different norms of interaction and people’s values for successful communication (Saville-Troike, 2003). Therefore, both the acquisition of the linguistic system and a certain degree of familiarity with the target culture must be emphasised in FLTL.

The 1990s, along with the on-going process of globalisation and intensified internationalisation, witnessed a cultural turn in FLTL in that an intercultural dimension was introduced. As FLTL indicates a connection between learners and a world that differs from their own, one can say that FLTL is inherently intercultural (Sercu et al., 2005). This contemporary emphasis on ‘intercultural’ does not simply encourage FL learners to develop knowledge about a foreign country, but an understanding of themselves in relation to another culture in the language classroom (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009). The objective of FLTL is to help FL learners to understand how IC occurs, how social identities are part of IC, how their perceptions of others and others’ perceptions of them influence the quality of IC, and how they can learn about the people they are communicating with in the IC context (Byram,

Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002). This implies a shift in emphasis away from a narrow focus on linguistic or communicative competence, and towards a more holistic goal of intercultural competence, which helps them to prepare for interactions with culturally different others and enable them to understand and accept others with distinctive perspectives, values and behaviours.

Many argue for the incorporation of an intercultural dimension in FLTL, aiming to develop FL learners as intercultural speakers or mediators who are ‘able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity’ (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002, p. 9). Liddicoat and Scarino (2013, p. 42) see an intercultural dimension to FLTL in similar terms:

*Languages and cultures as sites of interactive engagement in the act of meaning making and implies a transformational engagement of the learner in the act of learning. Here, learning involves the student in a practice of confronting multiple possible interpretations, which seeks to decentre the learner and to develop a response to meaning as the result of engagement with another culture (Kramsch & Nolden, 1994).*

Byram (1997, 2009) proposes one of the most widely applied frameworks (ICC model) and claims that language learners are expected to understand and interpret information in other cultural contexts, to decenter and take up others’ perspectives, and to analyse both their own and others’ culture through FLTL. Byram, in his ICC model with 5 *savoirs*, highlights the objectives of FLT as developing a range of intercultural

competences. The situation of intercultural dimension in a CFL educational context will be discussed in the following section.

#### **2.1.4 Developing intercultural competence in Chinese as a foreign language teaching and learning**

Over recent decades, with the rapid economic growth of China and its rising prominence on the world stage, the demand for learning CFL is growing and the promotion of CFL has been accelerated. As a result, the number of people choosing to study CFL has been increasing at an unprecedented rate. According to official statistics released by Hanban,<sup>2</sup> there were 20 million non-native speakers studying Chinese in 2003, 25 million in 2004, 30 million in 2005 and 40 million in 2006. The numbers of CFL learners has maintained a steady growth of 20% per year, and for 2018 the estimated number of CFL learners was set to be 150 million.

CFL education has gradually attracted increasing attention from governments and educational communities across the globe. In response to the demand, many universities, colleges, and even secondary schools have instituted CFL programs (Xing, 2006). Many universities in foreign countries offer courses in CFL, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, and Singapore. Such an increasing demand for CFL poses a great challenge for CFL education.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hanban.edu.cn/>

Despite the increased attention to CFL, it remains under-explored in the literature. As part of FL, trends and developments in CFL are generally like those in FLTL. In the 1980s, because of the boom in cultural studies across European countries, intercultural competence was initially introduced into CFL education at that point, influenced by developments in EFL education. Lü (1987) argues that the basic task for FL education is to develop learners' ability to use FL for social communication. Zhang (1989) made it clear that CFL education is the FL education that specifically serves communication. Prior to this, CFL education upheld language knowledge as the core focus and emphasised teaching the language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation (Li, 2006).

At the beginning of the 21st century, Chinese scholars caught up and reached a consensus, proclaiming that intercultural competence theories should be implemented into CFL education. This message was explicitly elucidated by The Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban), *Standards for Teachers of Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages* (2007) and *Chinese Language Proficiency Scales for Speakers of Other Languages* (2007a). These scales reflect the consensus that CFL education should not only focus on teaching language structure or developing language proficiency but also promote language learners' intercultural competence.

The development of intercultural competence emphasises the role of culture in the acquisition of CFL. Zhang (2006) believes that the best mode of teaching and learning CFL is the integration of language and cultural teaching and learning. Similarly, Bi

(2009) argues that the cultivation of intercultural competence, not only relies on teaching language knowledge, but also the accumulation of cultural knowledge, which this is the profound challenge faced by Chinese educators in CFL education. In respond to the demand for clarification in terms of what, when, and how culture should be taught in CFLTL, Hanban issued the *International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education* (ICCLE) in 2008, which is used as a framework for CFLTL across the world. ICCLE (2008) views linguistic and cultural knowledge from an intercultural perspective, in which linguistic competence is placed at the central place and cultural knowledge, cultural understanding and cross-cultural awareness are included. However, this framework lacks specific contents regarding which cultural knowledge should be taught and how it should be taught in CFLT. Although some universities and colleges includes culture teaching into CFLT, most of these courses are mere introductions to Chinese history, geography, and customs, Chinese language courses are limited to a superficial level, which would bring difficulties for CFL learners to reach a broader level of understanding that encompasses intercultural understanding and awareness and further influence their development of intercultural competence.

However, there seems to be disparity in understanding how to develop learners' intercultural competence between Zhang (2006, 2016) and Byram (1997). This may be typical of different Chinese and Western approaches to teaching intercultural competence. Without wanting to essentialise culture into two blocks, there are notable

differences in the way intercultural understanding is taught. In the Chinese model, the emphasis resides on knowledge of culture, whereas in Byram's model, the emphasis is on skills. According to Zhang (2006, 2016), CFL teachers understand intercultural language teaching as cultural teaching, emphasising on which strands of cultural knowledge should be included and how it should be taught. However, Byram's perspective highlights developing learners' skills to use cultural knowledge to facilitate IC at the same time as developing language skills.

Although the importance attached to developing intercultural competence as the main objective of FLTL has been widely acknowledged, the discussion of cultural and intercultural dimensions of FL education presents different understandings from Western and Chinese perspectives, which directly influences learners' development of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2009b; Zhang, 2006, 2016). As discussed, Chinese approaches have failed to integrate intercultural dimensions in CFL education.

In addition to CFL education, study abroad programmes have a unique role in developing CFL learners' intercultural competence, which is discussed below.

### **2.1.5 Study abroad**

In recent decades, there has been a significant trend towards the internationalisation of higher education worldwide, leading to an expansion of internationally mobile students, which prepares students to become global citizens and specialists in the

globalised world (Jackson, 2008). According to UNESCO (2012), roughly 2.72 million students studied abroad in 2005, which increased to over 4.6 million in 2015 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2017). Reasons for studying abroad are complex, with the most important motivations, as noted in the literature as, career prospects, personal needs, academic requirements and educational benefits. From the perspective of future careers, factors relating to students' intention to study abroad and their choice of destination country indicate that their expectation of gaining more opportunities for employment, career enhancement, higher income and professional improvement through skills and knowledge, improved language ability in particular, are expected to be sought in the host country (Anderson & Lawton, 2015; Bernunger & Mattsson, 2008; Franklin, 2007; Stroud, 2010). From the personal perspective, studying abroad is driven by a student's internal desires or needs, e.g. for personal improvement, experiencing academic life and associated cultural challenges (Anderson & Lawton, 2015; Bernunger & Mattsson, 2008; Davey, 2005). In addition, educational factors, such as the quality and reputations of the host institution, heavily influence students' decision to study abroad (Bernunger & Mattsson, 2008; Davey, 2005; Maringe & Carter, 2007). Given that studying abroad provides a different cultural context, cultural aspects also motivate students to pursue an overseas education. Broadening intercultural experiences, increasing intercultural sensitivity and obtaining different perspectives and understandings of the host culture also push students to have more contact with the target culture and people (Anderson & Lawton, 2015; Davey, 2005; Jackson, 2008).

In China, international education has experienced rapid development. In recent years, China places high value on internationalisation and increasingly recruited international students. Data from the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2015) shows that 377,054 international students chose China as their study abroad destination in 2014, and this figure increased to 442,773 in 2016 (MoE, 2017). One of the primary objectives for education abroad to China is for learning Chinese as a foreign language, which is becoming increasingly popular worldwide, inside and outside of China (Liu & Tao, 2009). The ascendancy of CFL learning reflects on the rising status of China on the world stage, and CFL programmes are used as a means to promote Chinese culture and to elevate the nation's global influence (Erard, 2006; Liu & Tao, 2009). In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed an important opening-up initiative—One Belt One Road, to promote and strengthen higher education cooperation and exchanges (Lu & Tian, 2018). China's University and College Admission System (CUCAS), an important institution that is seen as a window to Chinese higher education to the outside world, explains that there are an increasingly more employment possibilities for international students in China (Dervin, Härkönen, & Du, 2018). In addition, CUCAS argues that the quality of education and international recognition in experiencing Chinese culture firsthand and the employment advantages are the key motivations for studying abroad in China. The rise of study abroad programmes has resulted in research and publications that consider the experiences and development of studying abroad more generally and those of international students in China more specifically.

Both educators and international students tend to take the same position—that studying abroad, which provides a context for being completely immersed in the target language and culture, is one of the most efficient and effective means for FLL due to its perceived advantages in FLL and intercultural competence development (Freed, 1998; Guo, 2015; Lafford & Collentine, 2006). Studies show that students that choose to study abroad expect that such an experience will benefit their language learning significantly. The substantial immersion in the target language and opportunities to interact using the target language with native speakers who are able to respond in a native, colloquial and idiomatic manner is proved to be crucial for enhancement in FL competency, which has been empirically identified (Freed, 1998; Pellegrino, 1998). For instance, Freed (1998) found that learners who study abroad with opportunities for IC appear to speak with greater confidence and ease, and formulate their speech to express more abstract and complicated thoughts. However, relatively recent studies (e.g. Berg, 2009; DeKeyser, 2010; Dewey, 2007) have problematised this and demonstrated that studying abroad does not necessarily lead to FL development.

Studying abroad is broadly supported by the longstanding belief that it contributes to the development of intercultural competence (Williams, 2005). Various studies find that such intercultural experience is conducive in reducing stereotypical and prejudicial feelings between individuals within each group, which leads to a more positive view of the host culture, an expanded global perspective, and an increase in

intercultural sensitivity and awareness (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Douglas & Jones-ridders, 2001; Williams, 2005). However, empirical evidence suggests that not all international students benefit in this regard and being in a foreign context does not automatically lead to significant development (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Jackson, 2009).

Various studies investigate international students' intercultural experience, aiming to identify difficulties in IC and examine the reasons behind development failures in this context. The lack of understanding and skills in the areas of culture and interculturality have been highlighted by some studies. For instance, Xiao and Petraki (2007), in the study of international students' difficulties and failures in IC while abroad, uncovered the fact that, though language proficiency is important, it alone cannot guarantee effective IC if an understanding of the host culture is limited. Zhou and Griffiths (2011) survey the problems Chinese college students have with their ICC and their failure in IC, and they discovered that focusing solely on the foreign language does not cultivate students' IC skills and intercultural awareness if cultural knowledge is not emphasised in language teaching, which is in accordance with Hao and Zhang (2009).

Liao (1996) places emphasis on knowledge of the target culture and advocates the inclusion of L2 cultural knowledge in FL teaching courses, arguing that a lack of cultural knowledge can lead to more serious communication problems than linguistic mistakes. A similar point of view is stated by Zhao and Edmondson (2005) who

propose that cultural knowledge needed for IC should be embedded in relevant courses. However, when reviewing culture teaching research in CFT, Li (2006) finds that the inadequacy of CFL culture teaching, the lack of systematic or coherent culture teaching material, unclear teaching goals, or a lack of teacher training all bring difficulties in cultural teaching in CFL education, which is supported by Wang (2018) to a great extent. Wang (2018), in the exploration of British CFL learners' shared problems in the use of cultural discourses, finds that CFL learners tend to hold expectations about cultural correctness, which hinders a critical, broader and dynamic understanding of culture. Thus, this study considers what cultural knowledge should be taught, and how.

Recently, Jin (2017), in her study of identity perceptions of CFL learners at UK universities, found that instead of being limited to information and content, CFLT should involve intercultural processes where CFLT becomes an act of cultural engagement in CFL learners' past, present and future in order to develop intercultural awareness and sensitivity, which is a fluid and life-long learning process – an emphasis on the 'being' and 'becoming' of learners (Dervin, 2010; Jin 2017). Further evidence also suggests that students' respectful attitude for cultural differences contributes to the development of intercultural sensitivity and the improvement of the level of engagement in intercultural interactions (Penbek, Şahin, & Cerit, 2009). Similarly, Wang (2018) and Sheu (2018) find that CFL learners' open-minded, proactive attitudes affect their views of the target culture and help to gain a greater

understanding of the host population. This reinforces the literature that indicates the critical importance of attitude for developing intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2009a).

Literature reviews on studying abroad indicates an emphasis on the mobility of Chinese students abroad, while studies into the experiences of international students in China remain limited (Dervin et al., 2018). This brings difficulties in identifying research within the literature that specifically focus on IC between CFL learners and Chinese students in China. In order to fill the gap in empirical research, give some insights in CFLT, and to make sense of CFL learners' IC experience, this study focuses on exploring CFL learners' IC experience and their perceptions of intercultural communicative competence.

To make sense of intercultural competence, the next section elaborates relevant theories and models of intercultural competence including Byram's ICC model with 5 *savoirs*, which are discussed in-depth.

## **2.2 Understanding of intercultural communicative competence**

There has been growing interest in developing foreign language learners' intercultural competence in recent decades. However, it has been observed that there is no universally agreed-upon definition of intercultural competence. The concept is widely contested and has multiple synonyms. This section first explores and presents conceptualisations of the construct, which will be used as a theoretical basis for this

study. It then offers a brief overview of intercultural competence models with special attention paid to Byram's (1997) ICC model, as this is used as a theoretical framework to guide the whole research.

### **2.2.1 Conceptualisation of intercultural competence**

Global researchers have invested effort and developed plenty of definitions of intercultural competence in its various iterations over the past 60 years; however, no precise consensus has been reached (Deardorff, 2006, 2009). There seems to be wide agreement that intercultural competence, in its broadest sense, can be defined following Fantini and Tirmizi (2006) as 'a complex of abilities needed to perform *effectively* and *appropriately* when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself' (p. 12, italics in original). To elaborate the meaning embedded in the terms of 'effectively' and 'appropriately', Fantini (2009) relates the notion of 'effective' as the view of an individual's own perceptions regarding their performance during an intercultural encounter from an outsider's view of the host culture. 'Appropriate' relates to how an individual's performance is perceived by natives from an insider's view.

Throughout the literature, a wide variety of terminologies have been utilised to describe intercultural competence, confirming the complexity of the concept and the lack of consensus among researchers. These include intercultural communicative competence, cross-cultural communication, intercultural sensitivity, cross-cultural adaptation, some of which are used interchangeably (Fantini, 2009). Essentially, these

terms attempt to account for the ability to step beyond one's own culture and function with other individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Byram (1997) provides the most influential definition of intercultural competence (he uses 'intercultural communicative competence' in his work) in the field of FLTL. Intercultural communicative competence (ICC), according to Byram (1997), is defined as an 'individual's ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries' (p. 7) and is based on five '*savoirs*' as complementary to learners' communicative competence.

Byram (1997) introduces the possibility of distinguishing between intercultural competence and ICC. Intercultural competence refers to individuals' ability to interact with people from different culture backgrounds in their own language, while ICC refers to individuals' ability to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds in a foreign language, including abilities to deal with a wide range of situations. Intercultural communicative competence involves mediating interactions between culturally different others and establishing and maintaining relationships in consideration of cultural values and behaviours from both one's own and the interlocutors' perspectives, and striving towards developing skills to manage cultural difference without judgment, rather than merely exchanging information or communicating messages (Byram, 1997). In relation to this empirical study that focuses on CFL learners' IC with native speakers of Chinese using Chinese, this study applies ICC, which specifically refers to these abilities in this thesis.

## **2.2.2 Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence**

### **2.2.2.1 Rationale for choosing Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence**

As noted, numerous attempts at describing and defining ICC are present in the literature and summarised above. The complexity of the construct and its interdisciplinary nature gives rise to conceptualisations that differ in a number of ways. Spitzberg and Chagnon (2009) summarise many influential ICC models and theories, contributing to the understanding of ICC and the factors involved. Among these, Byram's ICC model has been particularly influential in FLTL and continues to be used in research into ICC (Hoff, 2014; Sercu, 2004). Based on the understandings of intercultural theories and the consideration of the present research focus and context that closely relates to FL education, Byram's ICC model significantly influences this empirical study and is adopted as a framework to guide this project.

Participants involved in this study are international students studying CFL in a Chinese university; development in proficiency and cultural knowledge embedded in language is crucial for IC with native speakers. In this sense, given the complexity of linguistic and cultural factors, Byram's model is appropriate as it places an emphasis on the importance of linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in ICC. Although Byram's model (1997) consistently and extensively operationalised ICC from the aspect of FLT, regarded as measurement criteria of FL learners' ICC, specific objectives are described to assess and evaluate students' intercultural experience.

Because of the participants' identity as FL learners and international student sojourners, their intercultural experience can be best examined by Byram's ICC model as his notion of ICC originated from the qualities of the sojourner that can be developed through FLT. In addition, Byram prioritised integrating critical cultural awareness into FL education and ICC, highlighting students' reflective and critical evaluation of similarities and differences regarding the practices, products and perspectives of both their own and host cultures, which sets a foundation for CFL learners to critically evaluate their IC experience.

### **2.2.2.2 Models of communicative competence**

The history of ICC can be traced back to Hymes (1972) who coined the idea of communicative competence (CC), which concerns, not merely the rules of grammar, but also the rules of appropriate language use in a variety of communicative situations (Bagari & Mihaljevi, 2007). Knowing a language means to know when or when not to speak, what to talk about, when, where, with whom, and in what manner (Hymes, 1972). FLTL has already shifted its emphasis from the study of language as a system in isolation to being able to use a FL appropriately and effectively in a given social or cultural setting (Jackson, 2014; Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2008). It is therefore worth understanding the construct of CC and the abilities needed for communication.

The notion of CC has been discussed and refined by many scholars and researchers in the FLTL context, attempting to propose frameworks and define specific components to construct CC. Inspired by Hymes, Canale and Swain (1980) proposed the first and

widely cited comprehensive CC model. Like Hymes, they argue that grammatical competence is not the entirety of language, but just one component of CC, indicating that an exclusive focus on grammar is not effective for teaching communication skills. In this model, CC is understood as a synthesis of underlying systems of knowledge and skills required for communication, positing three components under the heading of CC: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Subsequently, Canale (1983) elaborated and expanded this model and divided strategic competence into strategic and discourse competence.

Another model that deserves attention, particularly since it motivates the recent understanding of ICC, is van Ek's (1986) framework for the Council of Europe, namely 'communicative ability'. This contains comprehensive FLL objectives, emphasising that FL education is concerned, not merely with developing communication skills, but also with social and personal development as an individual. His framework indicates reference to 'social competence', 'the promotion of autonomy' and the 'development of social responsibility' (Byram, 1997, p. 9). To be specific, van Ek (1986) sees communicative ability as comprised of six competences: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, sociocultural, and social competence. He highlights that these are not discrete, but different aspects of one concept.

### 2.2.2.3 Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence and 5 'savoirs'

Building on Hymes' notion of CC and drawing heavily upon van Ek's model of communicative ability, Byram (1997) proposed a framework of ICC in the context of FLTL as a guideline for language teachers and teacher educators. Byram emphasised the interwoven links between CC and modified the concepts of linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence to give greater weight to 'discovery', 'interpretation' and 'establishing a relationship', which he regards as crucially important for intercultural speakers (Byram 1997, p. 48). His definitions follow (Byram, 1997, p. 48):

- *Linguistic competence*: the ability to apply knowledge of the rules of a standard version of the language to produce and interpret spoken and written language;
- *Sociolinguistic competence*: the ability to give to the language produced by an interlocutor — meanings which are taken for granted by the interlocutor or which are negotiated and made explicit with the interlocutor; and
- *Discourse competence*: the ability to use, discover and negotiate strategies for the production and interpretation of monologue or dialogue texts which follow the conventions of the culture of an interlocutor or are negotiated as intercultural texts for particular purposes.

These formulations share the main characteristics of those in van Ek's model of CC. However, van Ek's idealised native speaker model is amended to the concept of intercultural speaker. As intercultural speakers, learners have the ability 'to interact with "others", to accept other perspectives and perceptions of the world, to mediate

between different perspectives, to be conscious of their evaluations and differences' (Byram, Nichols, & Stevens, 2001, p. 5). To become an intercultural speaker, learners should be both linguistically and culturally competent; therefore, beyond the above three competences, Byram suggests that certain specific attitudes, knowledge and skills are required in IC.

Intercultural competence consists of five separate, but interdependent components, '*savoirs*', including knowledge, attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. These five *savoirs* aim to explain intercultural competence aspects an FL learner should acquire in order to mediate between differences. These, according to Corbett (2003, p.31), are presently 'the most fully worked-out specification of intercultural competence, which involves the kinds of knowledge and skills needed to mediate between cultures'. The objectives Byram (1997) set for the five *savoirs* serve as guiding criteria to develop and evaluate intercultural competence, particularly in the context of FLTL. Definitions of these categorised objectives can be found in Appendix 1. Figure 2 presents a condensed visualisation of Byram's ICC model, highlighting the interaction between its constituents. It clearly shows a combination of communicative competence and intercultural competence and calls for a model of ICC relevant to education.

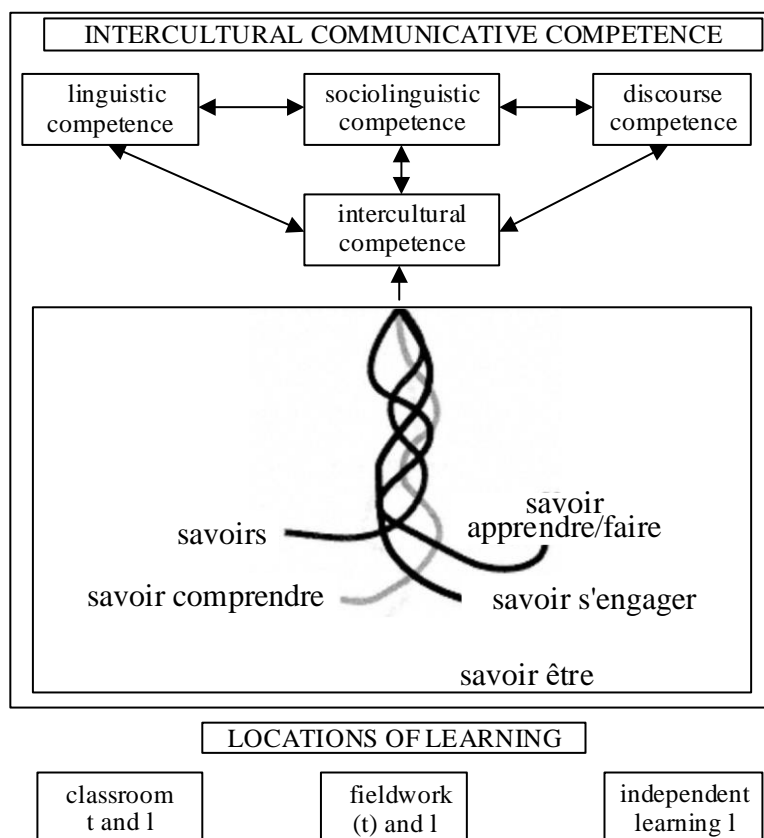


Figure 2. Byram’s model of ICC (Byram, 1997, p. 73)

As shown in the model, the five *savoirs* are essential in developing intercultural competence and are strongly intertwined and connected to communicative competence. They stem from three general categories of knowledge, attitude and skills. Among these, knowledge and attitude are perceived as preconditions, which can be modified during the process of IC through applying two skills (Byram, 1997).

Table 1 presents a schema of the factors involved in IC.

	<b>Skills</b> interpret and relate ( <i>savoir comprendre</i> )	
<b>Knowledge</b> of self and other; of interaction: individual and societal ( <i>savoirs</i> )	<b>Education</b> political education critical cultural awareness ( <i>savoir s'engager</i> )	<b>Attitudes</b> relativising self valuing other ( <i>savoir être</i> )
	<b>Skills</b> discover and/or interact ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )	

Table 1. Factors in intercultural communication (Byram, 1997, p. 34)

### Knowledge

Knowledge (*savoir*) is described as being comprised of two major categories: ‘knowledge about social groups and their cultures in one's own country, and similar knowledge of the interlocutor's country’ and ‘knowledge of the processes of interaction at individual and societal levels’ (Byram, 1997, p. 35). Knowledge about one’s own countries and that of the others will be brought to IC, therefore equipping students of knowledge of the self and others is crucially important (Coperías-Aguilar, 2010). As knowledge of individuals’ own countries may become part of their social identities, people will acquire an identity to varying degrees while accumulating knowledge, which is important for them and their interlocutors.

According to Byram (1997), knowledge brought to IC is relational. The knowledge people acquire within one social group may be opposingly presented to others. That is to say, the way one’s access to knowledge directly influences what knowledge they

will obtain. It is worth noting that knowledge that people have gained may not be 'objective' and 'correct'. Instead, some may be inscribed with prejudice and stereotypes. If knowledge is brought to a conversation, people not only gain it and deepen their understanding of others, but also refine their existing knowledge.

The second category closely links the knowledge of processes of interaction at individual and societal levels, indicating knowledge of the socialisation process itself. This kind of knowledge cannot be acquired automatically. However, it acts as a foundation for successful IC. Byram (1997) asserts that it is important but not sufficient to have declarative knowledge about facts, figures and traditions. This also needs to be complemented by procedural knowledge of appropriate and sensible ways to act in specific individual and societal circumstances.

### **Attitude**

Byram (1997) highlights the fundamental role of the attitudes of intercultural speakers and mediators. Attitude (*savoir être*), the emotional level of ICC, is defined as 'curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own' (Byram, 1997, p 57). When IC happens, attitudes towards people from different social groups and cultural backgrounds regarding their beliefs, behaviours and cultural meanings will be implicated. Such attitudes are often characterised as stereotypes or through prejudice, which is often, but not always, negative, resulting in unsuccessful IC as both negative and positive stereotypes may hinder mutual understanding. Moreover, individuals' attitudes may be modified

during an interaction. With more understanding of the self and others, people may notice their incorrect perceptions and attitudes towards other cultures and people due to their limited or unilateral understanding.

Cultural differences may increase the potential for misperceptions and misunderstandings that make cultural conflicts difficult to address (LeBaron & Pillay, 2006). Curiosity about others and other cultures helps to turn differences into opportunities to engage creatively with otherness and is seen as a prerequisite for constructively resolving cultural conflicts (Byram, 1997). In addition, openness to cultural differences provides an opportunity for people to perceive others from more than one perspective, and this is invaluable for the mediation and negotiation of cultural differences (Byram, 1997). More importantly, maintaining an intercultural attitude helps to obtain new knowledge and develop the skills needed to enhance ICC.

### **Skills**

Both attitude and knowledge are influenced by the process of IC, which is a function of skills. Skills are divided into two broad related categories that contribute to knowledge acquisition; skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*) and skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*) (Byram, 1997). As knowledge is not static, it is crucial for individuals to develop skills needed for, not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also, more importantly, making knowledge meaningful and applying it correctly.

The skill of interpreting and relating refers to the ability to interpret and analyse data from one's own and others' perspective, and to find associated relationships (Byram, 1997). It draws upon learners' conscious and existing knowledge, whose provenance may be formal education, direct interaction with culturally different interlocutors, or indirect interaction (e.g. documents). The skill of discovery and interaction requires learners to be able to 'acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction' (Byram, 1997, p. 52).

IC can provide learners with opportunities to discover, enrich their knowledge, establish and deepen their understanding of meanings, behaviours and beliefs involved in a particular phenomenon or cultural environment. They can communicate in increasingly complex and rich ways with culturally unfamiliar others. This often comes into play when people have partial knowledge (Byram, 1997). Though the skill of discovery is viewed as part of social interaction, it can be equally useful in other contexts, for example when coming across documents that us to identify relationships with different countries.

For the skill of interaction, people can draw on existing knowledge through curiosity about other cultures, to sustain sensitivity to different ideas, beliefs and identities, and to enhance skills of discovery and interpretation. People are not always required to establish relationships with their interlocutors, but need to mediate between people with different social identities or from different origins.

### **Critical cultural awareness**

Though individuals are curious about and open to others' values and behaviours; however, our beliefs are deeply embedded and can lead to reaction and rejection (Byram et al., 2002). This necessitates critical awareness of both intercultural mediators and ourselves. Critical cultural awareness (CCA), *savoir s'engager*, is the ability to 'evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries' (Byram, 1997, p. 63). The adjective 'critical' in the term CCA is not negative, as it underlines individuals' ability to think through and interrogate things prior to acceptance (Parmenter, 2003). CCA is the most crucial element of Byram's five *savoirs* as it provides an educational role for language teaching and is the outcome of the other four *savoirs* (Byram, 1997). CCA is associated with an individual's awareness of their own values and how these influence their perspectives of other people's values and ways of life. In addition to skills of relating and interpreting cultural differences, people should also be able to generate their critical views and build on logical criteria from their own and others' cultures. Byram (1997) argues that CCA not only enhances the transferability of skills and attitudes, but functions as 'a basis for studying other languages and cultures as well as coping with IC in other linguistic and cultural environment' (p. 103). CCA enables individuals to see themselves as others see them, to see the world from outside and other perspectives, and to become more thoughtful and critical of what they take for granted.

To sum up, ICC requires a combination of specific knowledge, attitudes, skills, and CCA that all lead to successful IC. With the acquisition of these aptitudes, individuals can view and think from other standpoints and may interact with and respond to others in a way others desire to be treated (Calloway-Thomas, 2010). These five interrelated components can be demonstrated through individuals' behaviours and IC.

### **2.2.2.4 Critiques of Byram's ICC model**

Of the ICC frameworks that have been produced, Byram's model provides clear, comprehensive and rich descriptions of components of ICC and continues to be the most widely applied. However, it is not without criticism.

One of the critiques of Byram's model concerns the understanding of 'culture', which is based on an essentialist and nationalist view with a strong national emphasis. As discussed in 2.2.1, this implies homogeneous and static entities, and ignores the complexities of social phenomena. The essentialist view indicates that culture is a concrete social phenomenon, representing essential characteristics of a particular national group (Holliday, 1999, 2000). Contrary to the essentialist position, a non-essentialist view of culture is more flexible and allows social behaviour to speak for itself rather than through imposed pre-definitions of essential national cultural characteristics (Holliday, 2000). Culture, according to Holliday (1999), is a 'dynamic, ongoing group process which operates in changing circumstances to enable group members to make sense of and operate meaningfully within those circumstances' (p. 248). A simplified understanding of culture risks stereotyping and overgeneralising.

Byram's model indicates the rigid boundaries between native and foreign, Self and Other; and cultures themselves (national cultures) are assumed to be more homogeneous, static or fixed than the reality (Kramersch, 1999, in Byram, 2009a, p. 329). Belz (2007, p. 137) explains:

*Byram (1997: 20, 32, 36, 39-40) appears to equate the concept of 'culture' with that of 'nation'. Such a position does not adequately recognise or value nation-internal diversity (e.g. Germans of Turkish extraction or Frenchmen of North-African origin) or the existence of ideologically or ethnically bound groups that span national borders (e.g. the Muslim ummah or community) or who have no national borders (the Sinti-Roma people; the Kurds).*

Byram acknowledges and responds to this criticism in that, it is not an effect of nationalism, but rather a consequence of writing for a particular audience of FL teachers (Byram, 2009).

Criticisms of Byram's ICC model have also accentuated its dichotomy of language and culture (Risager, 2007). This is evidenced by the potential separation of communicative elements (linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence) from intercultural elements (five *savoirs*). As mentioned in section 2.2.1, Risager (2007) introduced the concept of linguaculture, purporting that language practice is in itself a form of cultural practice, which seems to contradict Byram's stance. It is apparent that Byram (1997) does not propose such a separation; instead his model stresses the inseparable relationship between language and culture in FLTL. However, a

systematic view of this relationship is lacking; it could be mapped to the mechanics of the practice of everyday life (Díaz, 2013).

Byram's ICC model is theoretically generated with a range of teaching objectives that can be used for planning teaching and assessment without specifying 'links of dependency or interdependency among the competences' (Byram, 2009, p. 325).

Owing to the nature of the ICC model as a schematisation, Byram (2009) recognises that it lacks specificity in every detail or a dialectic ordering to explain which competence should be taught prior to another, which leaves open significant aspects of practical procedures. Furthermore, how components of ICC interact and complement each other and the linguistic-oriented elements of Byram's model remain unclear. For this reason, Byram's model is criticised. Byram himself explained that his model does not intend to provide FL teachers with an explicit understanding or prescription of how to organise teaching activities or guide them to appropriately develop language learners' intercultural competence in conjunction with linguistic-oriented competences.

Houghton (2012) extends Byram's (1997) ICC model by proposing *savoir se transformer*—knowing how to become, with an emphasis on critical cultural awareness. With a recognition of how challenges posed by different worldviews contribute to critical understanding and adjusting to one's worldview, Houghton (2012), similar to Byram (1997), highlights the significance of being sufficiently competent to critically evaluate the self and others. Houghton's (2012) *savoir se*

*transformer* indicates knowing how to selectively and actively develop oneself through interaction with others, which involves an individual's reasoned reflection and rational decision making upon whether or not to change in response to the interlocutor. Byram (2009a) himself admits that his model is not exhaustive but simplifies the complexity of being an intercultural speaker. Houghton (2012) depicts ways in which FL teachers can guide students step-by-step to learn how to manage value judgments and develop themselves by encountering otherness, suggesting how to explore and interrogate their own attitudes, values and beliefs, to enable them to deconstruct taken-for-granted perceptions and assumptions. In Houghton's view on developing CCA, language learners should develop a non-judgmental stance towards cultural differences and know how to evaluate different cultural experiences and practices from a rational and explicit standpoint, and how to develop understandings of interlocutors by listening to others' perspectives and reducing their own resistance. This ultimately leads to a reconstruction of self in the process of identity development.

This component extends Byram's ICC model. Learners can cultivate their ability to reduce biased judgments towards host countries and reflect on their intercultural experience. Another criticism of Byram's framework is that it was developed for Western models of education. Consequently, applying Byram's model may pose some limitations regarding its applicability in a Chinese context.

## **2.3 Identity**

Identity is viewed as an essential and ubiquitous concept in IC. IC is essentially the presence of at least two people with different cultural backgrounds, each associated with a specific identity related to features associated with a group. Byram (2012) states that each individual is 'identified as someone who 'fits in' to a group of native speakers in terms of behaviours, appearance, opinions and beliefs, in short, culture' (p. 85), based on which they will perform differently in IC. Chen and Starosta (1999) similarly argue that ICC involves the ability to 'negotiate each other's cultural identity or identities in a culturally diverse environment' (p. 28). Studying abroad, which brings people from diverse cultural backgrounds together, provides possibilities for, not only encountering the world, but also encountering oneself (Sheppard, 2004). Clark and Dirkx (2000) argue that the change in context that comes along with studying abroad will challenge an individual's understandings of their identity. Given the importance of identity in IC and studying abroad, this section discusses identity and related theories.

### **2.3.1 Identity in intercultural communication**

Identity is defined as who we are and who others perceive us to be; a concept that has been studied from many perspectives. From a communication perspective, identity is not created by the self alone but is co-created with others through communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2009). It is stressed that identity is negotiated, reinforced, challenged and enacted via communication, which does not merely refer to language,

but involves behaviours, rules, actions and labels (Abrams, O'Connor, & Giles, 2002). In other words, identity emerges when messages are exchanged between individuals (Martin & Nakayama, 2009; Ting-Toomey, 2005). Therefore, identity in nature is flexible, interactive, and mutually and continually negotiable, and not static (Abrams et al., 2002).

Issues concerning identity are particularly important in IC. According to Ting-Toomey (2005), identity is linked to ICC and people who are competent in IC are able to achieve desired identity outcomes such as mutual identity understanding and respect, and conjoint identity valuation and satisfaction. Two concepts related to identity are important for understanding IC: avowed identity and ascribed identity (Collier, 2005). Avowed identity is comprised of group affiliations that one feels most intensely, a self-selected portrayal to which people want to be recognised (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014). Ascribed identity refers to a set of demographic facts and role descriptions (e.g. gender, social class) that others assume to hold true for you. This simply means identity is attributed by others (Spencer-Oatey, Işık-Güler, & Stadler, 2014).

In IC, people communicate based on their ascribed identity, which is how an individual is perceived, which may differ from their avowed identity. In this case, IC is bound to be frustrating for both sides. ICC thus can be understood as an individual's ability to reinforce the different identities that they wish to avow, negate, or be affirmed or granted by intercultural partners. In other words, ICC is at its greatest when avowed identity is consistent with ascribed identity (Collier, 2015).

Mistaken identities can generate communication problems in IC (Martin & Nakayama, 2009). Focusing solely on certain aspects while ignoring others may lead to mistaken conclusions about an individual's identity, which highlights the importance of recognising and balancing different aspects of identity. An individual's identity might be misunderstood as perceptions about their membership of a group may be different, depending on people's perspectives. Therefore, people's ability to perform identity clearly, matching avowed and the ascribed identities as close as possible, is key in IC (Martin & Nakayama, 2009).

### **2.3.2 Cultural identity**

Individuals' self-concepts and communication behaviours are predominantly derived from their membership of cultural groups. In this sense, it is cultural identity that defines and influences IC. People become more aware of their cultural identity when communicating with culturally different people than when they are in their own culture, as they can see themselves in contrast (Gudykunst, 2004). Cultural identity is therefore a ubiquitous concept and a principal identity component that occupies a central place in IC.

Cultural identity refers to the 'identification with and perceived acceptance into a larger cultural group, into which we are socialised and with which we share a system of symbols, values, norms, and traditions' (Liu, Volčič, & Gallois, 2015, p. 142). It is influenced by certain traits such as physical appearance, skin colour, racial traits, language usage and self-appraisal, and is formed through socialisation. According to

Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012), cultural identity involves ‘the emotional significance that we attach to our sense of belonging or affiliation with the larger culture’ (p. 79); in other words, the language individuals are comfortable with, the behaviour individuals feel at ease with to express themselves, and whom to befriend.

Cultural identity has value content and salience content (Liu et al., 2015). The former refers to the criteria that one utilises to evaluate appropriate behaviours, which may differ between cultures. Cultural identity salience refers to the strength of affiliation one has with a larger cultural group. Strong/weak associations of membership affiliation reflect high/low cultural identity salience. Cultural identity is closely related to the sentiments of belonging or connections to one’s culture in IC (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). Given cultural identity salience may become more or less salient to a group depending on the context, identity is fluid and subject to change (Jameson, 2007).

From a social constructivist perspective, cultural identity is generally understood as a form of social identity based on specific cultural norms that are all socially constructed (Friedman, 1994). Similarly, Gudykunst (2004) argues that ‘our cultural identities are our social identities that focus on our membership in our cultures’ (p. 66). Given that cultural identity is at the centre of this study, Friedman’s (1994, p. 238) definition is adopted:

*Cultural identity [...] refers to a social identity that is based on a specific cultural configuration of a conscious nature. History, language and race*

*are all possible for cultural identity and they are all socially constructed realities.*

### **2.3.3 Identity theories**

Important theories of identity that have guided research on ICC are social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978, Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and identity negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Each makes a distinctive prediction about identity change in students as an intercultural communicator during their sojourn abroad.

#### **2.3.3.1 Social identity theory**

Social identity, as used by social psychologists, is the bedrock of social identity theory (SIT). Originally formulated by Tajfel and Turner in the 1970s and 1980s, it is defined as ‘that part of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership’ (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). The core tenet of SIT is social categorisation, which details ‘the cognitive underpinnings of social identity processes’ (Abrams & Hogg, 1999, p. 11). People’s sense of belonging to certain social categories (e.g. gender, nationality, organisation, etc.) occurs through social categorisation and affective components associated with group membership (Tajfel, 1978). According to this perspective, social identity is consensual and shaped by social groups, and connected to fellow group members based on common features (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Having a social identity indicates being at one with a certain group that distinguishes itself from other groups.

### **Ingroups and outgroups in social identity theory**

SIT introduces the notion that people tend to categorise others into ingroups and outgroups. More specifically, SIT deals with intergroup behaviours. Ingroup represents a membership group within which people feel connected, whereas outgroup represents a non-membership group within which people feel emotionally and psychologically detached (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). Social identity is thus, not only the knowledge that an individual is a member of a group and of the defining characteristics of group membership, but also involves an emotional attachment to the group. Depending on the ingroup or outgroup memberships associated with individuals, social identity can be positive or negative. Being around an ingroup gives people a sense of belonging and security, while the outgroup offers a foundation for comparison (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012).

SIT states individuals tend to favour their ingroup members, to evaluate them more positively than outgroups, and to discriminate against outsiders (Levine, Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005). The tendency to favour or provide preferential treatment to ingroup members refers to 'ingroup favouritism', which is described as a 'positive attachment to and predisposition for norms that are related to one's ingroup' (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, p. 303). This highlights the desired ingroup membership by rejecting the outgroup identity. Not surprisingly, ingroup favouritism may lead to negative consequences (e.g. discrimination, prejudice, etc.). One notion closely linked to ingroup favouritism is ethnocentrism, suggesting that the ingroup is

superior to the outgroup. People are ethnocentric to some extent, and those with high ethnocentricity may feel suspicious, defensive and hostile towards culturally different others, especially those who have different cultural and social norms from their ingroup members. On the other hand, low ethnocentric people may feel interested in IC and will experience the benefits of increased ICC (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). Neuliep (2012) argues that ethnocentrism may lead to a lack of understanding or negative expectation of outgroup members, which negatively influences individuals' motivation and willingness to engage with people outside their ingroup and thus impact their identity.

### **Social identity theory in intercultural communication**

IC, according to Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) takes place when people's cultural group membership factors (i.e. cultural values) affect their communication process (p. 24). People are members of different cultures and the differences noticed in IC are attributed to, and explained by, such memberships. IC therefore emphasises cultures are characterised by a particular group of people who share common values, beliefs and meanings. The view of culture in IC refers to group forces that categorise or divide people into groups in accordance with characteristics they share, which helps mutual understanding (Scollon, Scollon, & Jones, 2012). Researchers further question: 'when you are dividing people up, where do you draw the line?' (Scollon et al., 2012, p. 4), warning against presupposing that IC will be guided by cultural group memberships and influenced by cultural differences. As individuals participate in

various groups, forming multiple group membership, IC is therefore understood as one type of intergroup communication, which is shaped by their salient social memberships (Gudykunst, 2003).

The focus of group membership, intergroup relationships and the multiplicity of identities in IC has its roots in SIT. Social identity theorists suggest two broad classes of identity that define different types of self — social identity and personal identity (Vaughan & Hogg, 2014). The former defines the self in terms of group memberships, associated with group or intergroup behaviours. The later defines it as personal attributes or interpersonal relationships associated with positive and negative interpersonal relationships and with unique personal features. SIT suggests that people have multiple social identities as they are members of various social groups and have many personal identities as being involved in different interpersonal relationships and possess clusters of idiosyncratic traits (Vaughan & Hogg, 2014). I argue that being categorised into a social group does not necessarily mean the loss of personal identity, depending on which identity is salient or activated.

SIT suggests that different self-concepts derive from different memberships of social groups and are activated through a change of situation and relevant self-categorisation stimuli. When applied to the IC context, one's particular identity will be activated and predominant as a function of relationships between either people involved in IC or in the context of interaction (Cupach & Imahori, 1993; Gudykunst, 2004). Activation of identity therefore refers to identity salience in a situation, which is 'functioning

psychologically to increase the influence of one's membership in that group on perception and behavior' (Oakes, 1987, p. 118, as cited in Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 229). Oakes (1987) stresses that identity salience is an individual's psychological significance of group membership and readiness to apply a category to themselves, which affects their perception, feelings, attitudes and behaviours to conform to the category.

SIT, from a group perspective, accentuates that similar people identify with each other and see each other as members belonging to the same group or in similar ways (Stets & Burke, 2000). To take this one step further, SIT deals with intergroup relations. Individuals in an IC context are categorised into different groups and labelled as ingroup or outgroup, which influences their sense of belonging or IC. Individuals' social identities and group memberships are not fixed, as ingroup membership can be rejected when behaviour is not approved by ingroups (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). In this case, social identities can be renegotiated or reconstructed according to changes to social contexts whereby any sense of belonging will change accordingly.

### **2.3.3.2 Identity negotiation theory**

The multiplicity and activation of identity in a situation as discussed above suggests that identity is a dynamic process of identifying with others, rather than a collection of static or unchangeable traits. For Ting-Toomey's (1999) identity negotiation perspective, people's concept of self and others is formed through communication. The concept of negotiation refers to 'a transactional interaction process whereby

individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and support their own and other's desired self-images' (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 40).

Identity negotiation is a mutual communication activity through which people attempt to evoke their desired identity and support or challenge others' identities (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

'Identity' in Identity Negotiation Theory (INT) refers to a reflective self-image or self-conception derived from cultural, ethnic and gender socialisation processes, acquired through interaction with others (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Identity, from the INT perspective, serves as the prime influence on how individuals attach meaning, develop labels and draw boundaries in forming the reflective view of the self and others. This compromises self-conceptions derived from group memberships of an emotionally significant category (social identities) and the conceptualisation of self that is defined in relation with, or in comparison to, others (Brewer & Miller, 1996; Ting-Toomey, 1999). INT assumes that people in all cultures expect positive group-based and person-based identities in any communicative situation. In this sense, they aim to obtain accurate knowledge of the self and others in an intercultural encounter to ensure mindful identity negotiation. Mindfulness is understood as one's 'readiness to shift the old frame of reference, to go beyond schemata in exploring other cultures, and to use new categories in their interpretation' (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000, p. 1) rather than heavily relying on familiarity, routinised categories or customary thinking.

Ting-Toomey (1999) proposed ten core assumptions across five themes: identity security-vulnerability, familiarity-unfamiliarity, inclusion-differentiation, connection-autonomy and stability-change. Although people want to achieve positive identities, their identity content and salience level impacts emotions, thinking or interactions with culturally different others. Following the SIT on identity salience, INT emphasises that it is desirable to be able to identify salient identity issues via mindful communication in everyday interactions, as this is crucial in understanding interlocutors as it uncovers the ways in which their identities are responded to, affirmed and validated (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

INT posits that humans have a universal need for identity security, trust, inclusion, connection, predictability and consistency in communication (Ting-Toomey, 1999). It is assumed that people will experience emotional safety regarding their sense of group-based and person-based identities in a culturally familiar environment, which refers to 'identity security'. In contrast, they will experience a degree of anxiousness or ambivalence because of a perceived fear of threat in a culturally estranged setting, which leads to identity vulnerability. Communicating with similar others contributes to the establishment of a reliable or predictable environment. People therefore tend to experience identity trust, but those who arrive in a new and unfamiliar setting will confront a challenge, in that communicating with dissimilar others develops a defensive or unpredictable interaction climate, which leads to identity distrust.

INT suggests that the identity inclusion-differentiation assumption deals with

membership-based boundary maintenance issues, which aim to strike a balance between the perceived emotional nearness and remoteness towards ingroups and outgroups (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). People experience identity inclusion with their self-image attached to their emotionally significant group memberships and are positively affirmed. They experience identity differentiation with their desired group memberships stigmatised. Regarding the thematic pair of identity autonomy and connection, people tend to experience interpersonal connection in a meaningful and close manner, while disconnection and separation leads to identity autonomy. People's perceptions and evaluation towards autonomy and connection are influenced by their cultural values, manifested through language use and nonverbal actions (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005).

INT is concerned with identity stability and change issues, individuals have a sense of identity consistent through time when in a familiar and predictable environment, which refers to identity stability. They experience identity change, transformation, and chaos when they are in unfamiliar and unpredictable cultural situations (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). It is assumed that when individuals experience identity disconnection or differentiation, they are more likely to cling to identity stability, but if they experience an optimal level of identity security, they are likely to be open to identity change. The establishment of identity stability together with security, trust, inclusion and connection depend heavily on cultural knowledge and communication skills (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). Cultural values and beliefs offer implicit criteria for

evaluating and enacting different identity-related practices that influence cultural membership, which direct how individuals think about their identities, construct others, and how they interact.

Successful identity negotiation is contingent on a willingness to conduct mindful IC and perceptions towards its outcomes. The criteria of mindful IC from an identity negotiation perspective are appropriateness, effectiveness and satisfaction of the management of desired shared identity meanings (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Ting-Toomey (1999) argues that satisfactory IC outcomes are achieved when desired identities are mindfully understood, respected and supported. By contrast, IC is of low satisfaction or a failure when desired identities are felt to be misunderstood, mindlessly bypassed, or insulted. INT examines how desired identities are achieved through negotiation and how the consequences of this process affect the quality of interpersonal and intergroup relationships. The ability to negotiate a desired identity in IC therefore indicates ICC. Individuals with ICC can be characterised as being attuned to identity negotiation issues. In other words, ICC contributes to identity negotiation while identity negotiation reflects ICC. ICC highlights an understanding of culturally grounded knowledge, openness and analytical empathy, the ability to understand conflict perspectives from multiple perspectives in a non-judgmental stance, and the ability to negotiate identities through nonverbal sensitivity, politeness and observation (Ting-Toomey, 2005, 2007). These are also highlighted in Byram's (1997) ICC model as discussed in previous section. Thus, INT is a helpful lens through which to

examine IC experiences and a sound framework to help understand how participants perceive their identity when negotiated during their IC. Instead of focusing on participants' identity negotiation process during IC, this study focuses on participants' retrospective reflections on their interactions and their perceptions of the outcomes of their own identity negotiation.

### **2.4 Formulation of research questions**

It is acknowledged that the context of FLL is an integral part of the development of FL learners' ICC. Context commonly refers to both the academic setting and the sociocultural environment. This idea resonates with Fantini's (2012) perspective that language development includes language learning in formal classroom settings and language acquisition in a naturalistic environment. What students learn from a formal FL classroom will be applied in actual IC; IC therefore reflects what students learn both inside and outside the classroom. Engaging in new academic and sociocultural contexts is the driving force for intercultural learning because it involves intercultural and interactional experiences with two or more cultures where intercultural learning and ICC development can take place.

The mastery of the target language in fact facilitates IC and individuals' entry to the host community and culture. Fantini (2012) argues that 'increased host language proficiency enhances entry possibilities, whereas lack of proficiency constrains entry, adaptation, and understanding of the host culture' (p. 273). However, it is not uncommon that FL speakers are fluent in the target language but have with little

understanding of the host culture (Byram, 2012a; Fantini, 2012). Recent literature notes that linguistic competence is still given priority among other attributes that need to be acquired, although intercultural scholars call for more explicit integration of linguistic competence and intercultural competence in FLTL (Byram, 2012a; Fantini, 2012). Accordingly, how target language competence and intercultural competence influence international students' IC with native speakers and their entry into the host culture, forms a crucial part of this study's investigation.

Moreover, studying abroad provides a novel language and cultural environment, and being involved in such an environment affords profound opportunities for identity reconstruction, which is clear in previous studies (Dolby, 2004; Plevs, 2015). Language, as central to identity construction, shapes and is shaped by an individual's identity (Edwards, 2009; Norton, 1997). Researchers have acknowledged the close link between FLL and an alternative mode of thinking that may be inconsistent with their initial understanding of culture (Edwards, 2009). In addition, the impact of IC on identity reconstruction has been evidenced in the literature (Gareis, 2017; Noels et al., 2012). This suggests that identity is assumed to be multi-faceted and IC sets a context for its (re)construction. Individuals' attitudes, knowledge and skills influence their social relationship formation, which is conducive to developing ICC. Therefore, how and to what extent IC experience influences international students' perceptions of themselves seems to be a valuable avenue for examining their development of ICC.

CFL education has attracted much attention in recent years. However, little research

has been identified within the literature that specifically focuses on the IC experiences of CFL learners in China and how they make sense of their experience and form perceptions of ICC and changes in identity. This study therefore aims to fill the gap in extant empirical study.

Inspired by the existing literature, though bearing in mind its limitations, the following research questions have been formulated to deepen our understanding of ICC:

- (1) How do learners of Chinese as a foreign language experience intercultural communication in China?
- (2) How do learners of Chinese as a foreign language perceive intercultural communicative competence?
- (3) How do learners of Chinese as a foreign language perceive their identity in the context of IC?

Given that intercultural experience lays a foundation on which perceptions of intercultural communicative competence and identity can be examined, this study explores the lived intercultural experience of CFL learners, which may give insight in how FLTL promotes students' IC. Examining international students' IC experience and how they make sense of it reveals not only their deepest concerns when encountering culturally different others, but abilities they most need to possess. In addition, it contributes to a deepening understanding of identities and how they are

(re)constructed. Therefore, through identifying the challenges encountered in IC and the abilities and skills that are conducive to the development of ICC and negotiating a desired identity, this study aims to provide insights and implications for academic staff and educators to improve FLT in order to meet students' needs and develop ICC. It can also be used as a reference for international students to enhance awareness of developing their ICC.

### **2.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter reviewed literature relevant to this study. The first section introduced the change in the objective of FLTL from solely focusing on linguistic competence to including intercultural competence. Accordingly, cultural learning holds a crucial place in FLTL. The definition of 'culture' in FLTL, the relationship between language and culture, and cultural and intercultural dimensions in FLTL were discussed. Particular attention was given to Chinese as a foreign language education in China.

The second section overviewed the emergence of the construct of ICC. It began with a conceptualisation of intercultural communicative competence. Then it discussed the theoretical framework employed in this study, including an outline of the communicative competence model, presenting Byram's influential ICC model and its critiques.

The third section focused on identity and related theories. These were addressed from three aspects, including identity, cultural identity, and identity theories, aiming to

provide insight into the relationship between IC, the development of ICC, and perceptions of identity. Based on the reviewed literature and research aims, research questions were presented in the fourth section.

## **Chapter 3 Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter sets out the methodology and methods used to address the research questions. It starts with a justification for adopting social constructivism as the research paradigm and a phenomenological approach as the methodological choice. It then describes and discusses issues related to researching multilingually, the data collection instruments and procedures, followed by the process and methods used for data analysis. Then, reflections on researcher position, ethical considerations and research trustworthiness are outlined and discussed.

### **3.2 Research paradigm**

Paradigm, in the context of research methodology, is ‘a net that contains the researcher’s epistemological, ontological and methodological premises’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13). It is informed by a researcher’s ‘philosophical assumptions about the phenomena to be studied, about how they can be understood, and even about the proper purpose and product of research’ (Hammersley, 2012, p. 2). It guides the researcher’s direction and informs the selection of an appropriate methodology and methods in order to generate, analyse and evaluate data (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2007).

This study adopts a social constructivist paradigm as the theoretical base, which fundamentally rests on the idea that social realities are dependent upon individuals' interpretations. Concurrently, these realities are constructed and reconstructed, viewed and reviewed by people involved in the interaction. This enables the researcher to give priority to participants' subjective understandings of phenomena, and also co-construct meaning based on their interactions (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). My philosophical position maintains that social reality is shaped and formed by individuals' experience and their interpretations, and the varied and multiple meanings of this experience lead researchers to look for the complexity of views and gain a comprehensive understanding of their meanings (Creswell, 2007). I am therefore interested in seeking the subjective understanding of participants' lived IC experience whilst engaging with native Chinese, which forms a foundation for knowledge of their understandings and interpretations of experiences and accounts. The focus is on generating knowledge based on participants' experiences and the meanings they attribute to them, aligned with a social constructivist paradigm.

As established in Chapter 1, this study aims to explore CFL learners' IC experience and how they perceive ICC and identity while studying in China. This study will show that CFL learners' experiences are challenging and they gain an understanding of ICC during IC with native Chinese in the host environment, which guides and informs their ICC development. Moreover, the challenges participants encounter and the development of ICC both influences and reflects how participants perceive

themselves and are perceived. Such dynamic characteristics can be best captured by applying a research paradigm that focuses on examining the processes, interpersonal interactions and social practices. As the purpose of this study is to collect rich data on participants' lived experience of a phenomenon through interactions, it is best suited to a social constructivist paradigm.

### **3.3 Rationale for a phenomenological approach**

Social constructivism is typically associated with qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). This study aims to explore participants' IC experience and their perceptions of ICC and identity that correspond to their experience to capture their worldviews and gather a holistic account of the IC phenomenon. The exploratory nature of this study, therefore, largely shapes my interest in a qualitative research approach, as a means to explore a detailed, comprehensive understanding of meanings individuals ascribe to IC in a natural setting while gaining valuable insights into participants' behaviours, views, thoughts and feelings (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2013).

A qualitative approach allows participants to describe their experience in their own words and to follow their sense of what is personally relevant (Merriam, 2007). This also allows researchers to describe participants' experience in a consistent and coherent manner. My intention in employing a qualitative approach is to rely as much as possible on participants' own IC experience, and perceptions of what they consider contributes to successful IC and what influences their identity to produce rounded and contextual understandings based on rich and detailed data.

Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences of phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). It describes the meaning of individual experiences, attempting to reduce these, identifying their essence to elucidate a deeper understanding (Creswell, 2007; Kvale, 2007; van Manen, 1990). It is an appropriate methodology for the exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and feelings in a particular context from their perspectives (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990).

There are two dominant schools of thought within this approach: descriptive and interpretive phenomenology. The assumption of descriptive phenomenology is that there are certain characteristics of experience that are common (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Aiming to explore the commonalities and generalised description that represent the nature of phenomena, context is peripherally important in descriptive phenomenology. Another philosophical assumption underlying descriptive phenomenology is that researchers must shed all prior knowledge and personal biases in order to grasp the essential lived experiences being studied. This is called 'bracketing' (Lopez & Willis, 2004). The fundamental concern is to go outside the experience and return back to the things themselves to elucidate the essential structures of the phenomenon without presuppositions assumptions, or previous experiences, as this can mitigate the potential deleterious effects of preconceptions tainting the research, thereby seeking to attain the genuine true essence of the phenomenon and enhance research rigor (Langdrige, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Going beyond a mere description of the essence of phenomena, the interpretive phenomenological approach looks for meanings embedded in individuals' lived experience, which may not always be apparent to them, but can be derived from their narratives. Therefore, interpretive phenomenology examines subjective experience, and more importantly, focuses on what the produced narratives imply about individual experience (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

A basic principle of interpretive phenomenology is that human beings are unable to separate their understandings, values or social context from those of others (Moustakas, 1994). In interpretive phenomenology, it is believed that researchers cannot abstract themselves from various contexts and it is impossible to understand anything from a purely objective point of view as things are understood within the context (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009). Accordingly, the idea of suspending presuppositions of researchers is rejected and researchers are viewed as individuals who actively co-create interpretations with participants to understand a phenomenon in context (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). The lived experience is therefore generated from participants' meanings and understandings, and researchers' interpretations. Researchers are not confined to interactions with participants but rather take a role that influences the entire research process. Thus, researchers' prior and contextualised understanding of phenomenon is a legitimate part of interpretive phenomenology.

Instead of focusing on commonalities in participants' experience, this study aims to gain a detailed description of their IC experiences, to go beyond the surface, and bring out embedded meanings to reach a deep understanding of the essence of their experience through a collective and continual interpretive process. As discussed in section 3.2, a social constructivist paradigm is adopted in this study under which research is viewed as a process of knowledge construction. Drawing upon my existing knowledge and understandings of IC, ICC, and identity, I, therefore, apply an interpretive approach to phenomenological research and aim to interpret participants' IC experience and perceptions as they describe from their lived experience.

When studying culture and communication in an intercultural context, the cultural, social and contextual factors inevitably influence the way in which IC is perceived. In this case different individuals may hold different perceptions and the meanings attributed to phenomena is unique to them. These considerations accord with interpretive phenomenological philosophy, postulating that individuals cannot fully understand others' experience as their interpretations are influenced by their history and surroundings (Lavery, 2003). Gadamer (2004) argues that language is the universal medium of understanding, which occurs in interpreting. In this case, understanding and interpreting are ultimately the same. Since this study is based on a pre-determined theoretical framework (Byram's ICC model), withholding existing theories and having themes emerge from data is impossible (Giorgi, 2006). Therefore, this study cannot follow the descriptive phenomenological approach. However, in

both approaches to phenomenology, it is vital to consistently give priority participants' experience. Bearing this in mind, I ensure that my own experiences and preconceptions do not overshadow the understandings of participants' experiences, whilst working on the assumption that bracketing is not possible for the present study.

### **3.4 Researching multilingually**

Through critically reflecting on the research process, one essential component was identified to be 'researching multilingually' (RM-ly). This pertains to the use of two languages (English and Mandarin Chinese) in the research process as they are common languages shared by participants and researcher (Holmes, Fay, Andrews, & Attia, 2013, 2016). Before conducting the interview, I was aware of certain issues regarding language (e.g. translation) as different languages are involved in the study; this took on more importance after conducting a pilot study. Therefore, I refer to Holmes et al.'s (2013; 2016) theoretical framework for RM-ly in order to reflect on issues arising from multilingual practice throughout the entire research design. I depict the framework graphically to show the overarching three-step process in developing researcher awareness, and key points are summarised below in Figure 3.

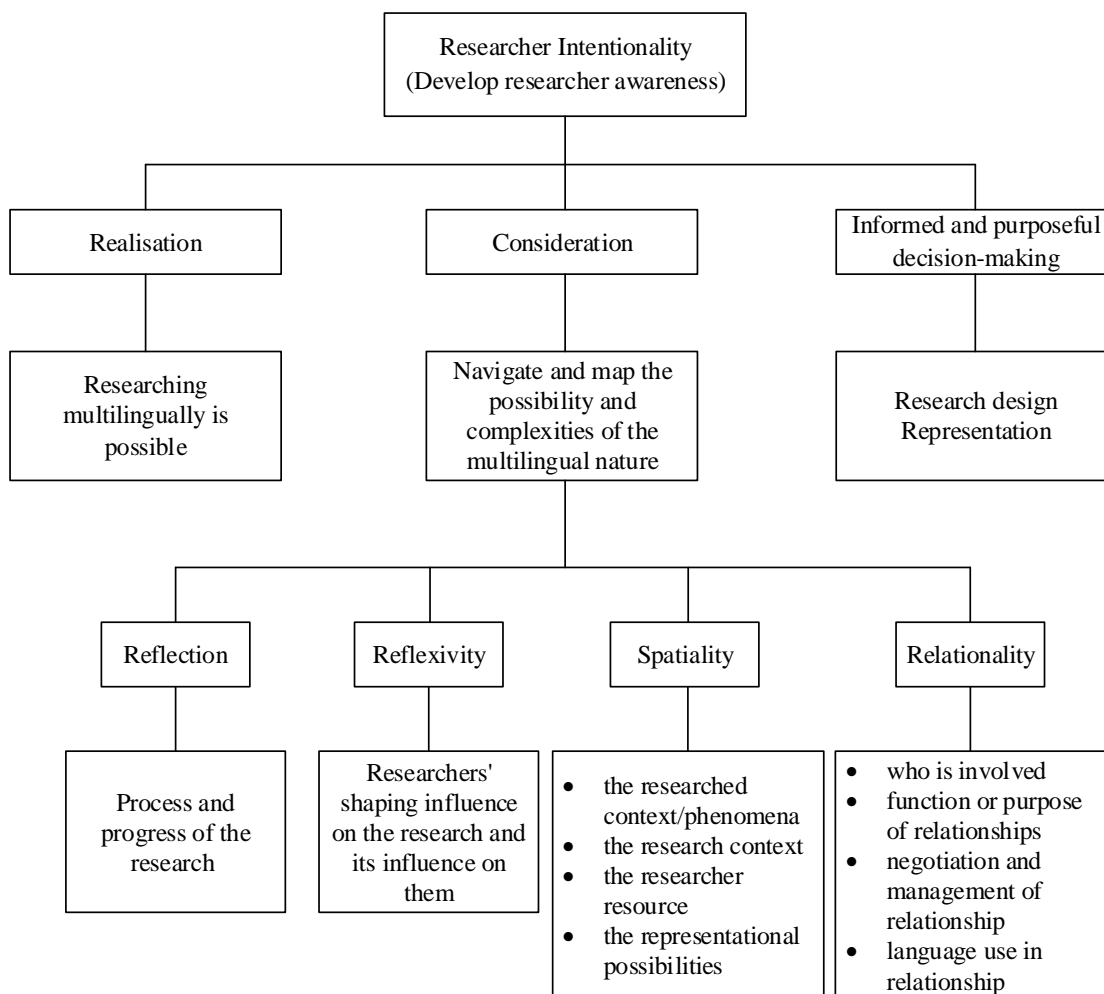


Figure 3. Framework for researching multilingually

The realisation and raised awareness of RM-ly possibilities was triggered during supervision and following the pilot study. I considered some of the general issues that may arise from RM-ly practice and the possibilities and complexities of RM-ly, including the spaces in which research occurs and the relationships it involves. Chinese and English are intertwined throughout the research, ranging from myself as the researcher being able to speak both languages and engaging with the literature in both, to the research site, language use for building rapport with participants,

interviewing and analysing data and the writing-up process. I have always been in the habit of reflecting and being reflexive to systematically explore the possibilities and complexities of RM-ly in regard to the dimensions of spatiality and relationality (Holmes et al., 2013, 2016). In terms of the spatial aspect, the researched phenomena involved a target group who speak both Chinese and English in a Chinese university where my project was based. When it comes to researcher linguistic recourses, although I am not a professional translator, I have lived in the UK for 5 years and I am sufficiently competent in Chinese and English translation. I also employed a friend who is competent in both languages to check the translations to ensure precision. Including two languages enabled me to be flexible about which language to use when conducting interviews. I was likely to collect data in both Chinese and English and write and report in English (including Chinese extracts and English translation). Although this is my work, I did not work alone, but with a range of people in different roles during my study. I shared relationships with, for instance, participants, translators and interpreters. This relationship building and language use significantly influenced the processes and outcomes of the research. This is discussed and considered throughout the entire research process. With consideration of the possibilities and complexities of RM-ly practice, I made informed decisions in terms of the research design and representation, and purposefully questioned these decisions.

### **3.5 Data Collection instrument and procedure**

Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach that makes use of research methods such as interviews and observations to capture in-depth understandings and perceptions of the nature of experience from participants' perspectives. To answer research questions, interviews are undertaken with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). The following subsections outline the data collection procedures, the rationale for choosing specific data gathering techniques and other related issues.

#### **3.5.1 In-depth semi-structured interview**

The interview method is broadly accepted as the main approach to data collection based on interpretative phenomenological methodology. As a way of collecting information about past experiences, the interview aims to gain rich and deep understandings and insights into participants' experiences and views of a phenomenon, to discover that which cannot be directly observed (Foddy, 1993; Patton, 2002), and to develop a conversational relationship with interviewees regarding their lived experience (van Manen, 1990). My research interests lie in participants' lived experience and the meanings they make, thus, in-depth interviewing is the best avenue of inquiry (Seidman, 2006). In-depth interviews allow a researcher to 'put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action' (Seidman, 2006, p. 10), and to describe accounts and stories that illustrate participants' understandings of their experience. Therefore, in-depth interviews have been adopted in this research.

A semi-structured interviewing format, positioned between a structured and unstructured interviews and includes the features and strengths of both, was utilised. A structured interview tends to be employed when the researcher is aware of what he/she 'does not know and can therefore frame appropriate questions to find it out', while an unstructured interview is typically used when the researcher is not aware of what he/she 'does not know and must therefore rely on the respondent to tell him or her' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 269). A semi-structured interview enables researchers to flexibly use both unstructured and structured configurations to varying degrees, dependent on a researcher's needs. In this study's semi-structured interview design, a set of pre-planned core questions were prepared to allow participants to talk about their IC experience. This was to ensure consistency among all participants without them being constrained to specific answers (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). It also allows the researcher to prompt for clarification on topics and to probe for extending, elaborating and clarifying responses to gather rich, in-depth and comprehensive information (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Lichtman (2010) encourages the beginner researcher to use the semi-structured interview because of its flexibility. With a specific research topic being studied, and a number of questions being prepared in advance, the flexible practice offered by the semi-structured interview benefits me as a beginner researcher.

According to Smith and Fowler (2006), a phenomenological interview should be structured enough to focus on participants' experience of the phenomenon and should

be open enough to allow for free expression. It should also allow interviewers to remain open to reformulate and adjust questions, and change the direction of the interview according to emerging data (Glesne, 2011). In this sense, this combination of a guiding protocol with a conversational approach was ideal (Patton, 2002). Open-ended questions were used to not only elicit answers, but also invite interviewees to explore their views, so they become more informant, than respondent (Patton, 2002). In addition, participants were given opportunities to elaborate questions or provide relevant information if they opted to do so.

### **3.5.2 Interview schedule and Pilot study**

#### **Interview schedule**

Informed by the literature, an in-depth semi-structured interview guide with all possible questions and probes was developed. The interview questions were based on eliciting participants' IC experience with native Chinese speakers with particular emphasis placed on perspectives pertaining to participants' IC experience. Based on an understanding of ICC and Byram's ICC model (see section 2.2), interview questions were designed to identify perceived abilities and skills to be developed in order to appropriately and effectively interculturally communicate. Moreover, drawing on the literature regarding identity (see section 2.3), questions relating to how identity is influenced, (re)constructed and negotiated within IC were designed. Considering international students' Chinese and English language proficiency, I assumed that some participants would be more competent and confident in using one

rather than the other, so the interview guide was prepared in both English and Chinese. Drawing on this interview schedule of questions (see Appendix 7 & 8), a pilot study was conducted.

### **Pilot study**

‘Do not take the risk. Pilot test first’ (De Vaus, 2002, p. 52). Doing a pilot study aims to evaluate the feasibility of a research project, to verify the adequacy of research instruments, to identify any problems, to check and to refine the research questions, to assess the likely success the recruitment approaches, and so forth (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002; Yin, 2014). Thus, before engaging in formal fieldwork, two pilot interviews of the actual questions were undertaken with two CFL learners selected from the same university, one being conducted in Chinese and one in English. The interview guide was developed based on the research questions (see Appendix 7 & 8). I felt this experience was extremely helpful in formatting and delivering interview schedules, and in practicing and improving interview skills. Since the interviews were audio-recorded, I listened again and reflected on the process before the next in order to obtain maximum value from the pilot studies. This enabled me to identify issues to address, to reform and generate questions to try in subsequent interviews, and to improve my interview skills.

Reflections on my pilot study provided some insights to my research questions; several issues and implications emerged. First, it provided some experience of interviewing and built my confidence, but I noticed that I needed to improve my

interviewing skills to some extent. I tended to speak too much and too swiftly, potentially blocking participants on expanding due to being afraid of silent spells of time. Often participants needed some time to reflect on their previous IC experience and marshal their thoughts, thus speaking too much could have influenced or altered their responses they planned to provide. More importantly, as the language in which the interview was conducted was not their first, they needed time to think about how to appropriately express their point. Therefore, I needed to develop the most important skill in interviewing, ‘LISTEN MORE, TALK LESS’ (Seidman, 2006, p. 78), thus ensuring interviewees were given enough time to think and answer questions before jumping in with the next.

Second, piloting the interview schedule was conducive in determining if the interview questions made sense to participants and yielded informative responses (Bryman, 2008). Participants’ comments and their responses to the interview questions were considered and incorporated to modify and further develop interview questions. For instance, ‘stereotypes’ (‘刻板印象’ in Chinese) was difficult for participants to understand. Therefore, I decided not to use this term but to rephrase it as ‘典型的印象或者已经形成的看法’ (typical impression or preconceptions) to make sure they could understand. Later, I sent the modified interview questions to friends who speak English and Chinese at a proficient level to review the translations and check clarity.

I found some questions were repetitive due to them eliciting similar answers, which led to redundant data. Questions such as, for example, ‘To what extent do you think

Chinese is important to learn?’ obtained the same information as the question ‘Why do you learn Chinese?’. Therefore, these questions were removed from the interview protocol.

I refined and expanded the original interview protocol after analysing the pilot data in the part — ‘identity and social change’. I noticed some questions, for example, ‘Can you define your identity?’, were far too general, so I refined these. Instead of directly asking participants to define and describe their identities, I explored their experience of change, which may reflect their identity. Both participants mentioned their difficulties and worries about life upon their return to their home country due to having changed. Therefore, I decided to probe about their experience and perceptions towards identity change on re-entry.

### **3.5.3 Access to the field**

The fieldwork in this study was launched at a single university and my access to this institution was smooth and straightforward. I went directly to the university and was able to gain immediate access through personal contact with potential participants. The potential participants were learning CFL in China, I did not meet them beforehand. After a brief self-introduction and on providing written information relating to the project, many potential participants showed a willingness to participate. Altogether 32 participants from different cultural backgrounds were recruited for interview. Interviews took place in cafés inside and outside the university.

### **3.5.4 Sampling**

This study adopted a phenomenological framework, where a basic criterion for sample selection is that the participants must experience the same phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), which in this study is intercultural communication. It requires a relatively homogeneous group of participants (Creswell, 2007), and therefore I opted for purposive sampling to access the target ‘knowledgeable people’ and sought to represent the salient characteristics of a particular named section of the wider population (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2007). This allows the researcher to obtain samples that can provide significant and meaningful experiences of the phenomenon under study that cannot be obtained by other choices (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2013). This is believed to ‘best enable the researcher to explore the research questions in depth’ (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 154). The goal of purposive samples is to sample participants strategically, so that those selected are highly relevant to the research questions and allow the research problem and central phenomenon to be understood (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2007). In this case, applying a purposive sampling approach reflects the intention to gather accounts from CFL learners to provide in-depth insights into their IC experience and their perceptions towards ICC and identity. I conducted the interview at the end of the academic year and potential participants were busy preparing for their examinations and leaving the country. To tackle this difficulty, I implemented snowball sampling; asking participants to identify or put me in touch with those who qualified for inclusion (Cohen et al., 2007).

This study assumes that through the experience of IC with native Chinese speakers, students can form a perception of what essential characteristics are needed in order to appropriately and effectively communicate with culturally different others. In other words, the experience of IC would provide useful insights for tapping into conceptualisations of ICC. Equally, it is also possible that through IC with other culturally and linguistically different others, individuals develop an awareness of who they are and how others view them. Based on this contention, the criterion for selection of participants was students who have IC experience with native Chinese speakers.

In light of the fact that participants' ability to provide clear reflection largely influences the process of accessing the essence of the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994), their capability to clearly describe the meaning of phenomena was prioritised in recruiting samples. In view of this, participants had to be able to verbally express themselves fully, accurately articulate their experience in Chinese or English and to provide accounts of actual situations to illustrate their behaviours from their lived IC experience.

To locate participants who met established criteria for in-depth semi-structured interviews, I approached X University and targeted CFL learners as potential samples for my interview; 5,924 international students attend, from more than 130 countries and the university operates on a large scale in the area of Teaching Chinese as Foreign Language, with large numbers of international students with diverse nationalities

enrolled. I was able to recruit 32 international students from many different countries who study CFL in China as participants, all from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds due to the assumption that they may have different perceptions of IC and ICC as they are influenced by linguistic and language differences. These students either studied in The College of Intensive Chinese Training in China under the Department of Chinese International Education or were enrolled on a Chinese course in the same department while doing a Master's degree.

A total of 15 male and 17 female students were invited to an interview. They came from 21 different countries, including 8 Asian countries, 3 African countries, 7 European countries, 1 North American and 2 South American countries. Their length of stay in China or studying Chinese varied from 1 month to 15 years. The interviews lasted between one and two hours approximately and Chinese and English were used languages used dependent upon each participant's choice. A detailed profile of all participants including their pseudonyms, gender, nationality, and length of study in China, as well as the duration for each interview is shown below (Table 2).

Pseudonym	Gender	Nationality	Length of study Chinese/stay in China	Interview language	Length of interview
Wu	M	Afghanistan	9 Months	Chinese, English	1h25min
Ruth	F	Benin	9 Months	Chinese, English	1h15min
Ye	F	Benin	9 Months	Chinese, English	1h05min
Carolina	F	Chile	4 Years	Chinese, English	1h46min
Tina	F	Colombia	1 Years	English, Chinese	1h29min
Natasha	F	Denmark	1 Year	English, Chinese	1h51min
Mike	M	Ghana	2 Years	Chinese, English	1h48min
Yixiu	M	Ghana	3 Years	English, Chinese	1h57min
Bai	F	India	9 Months	Chinese, English	1h05min
Konishi	M	Japan	9 Months	Chinese	1h10min
Tanaka	M	Japan	9 Months	Chinese	1h
Aisha	F	Kazakhstan	2.5 Years	Chinese, English	1h28min
Una	F	Nepal	3 Months	Chinese	1h15min
Casper	M	Netherlands	1.5 Year	English, Chinese	1h15min
Akashi	M	Pakistan	8 Months	Chinese, English	1h20min
Polina	F	Russia	2.5 Years	English, Chinese	1h05min
David	M	Slovenia	10 Months	English, Chinese	1h30min
Bella	F	Spain	5 Months	English	1h27min
Marcus	M	Sweden	3 Months	English	1h37min
Jessica	F	Tajikistan	1 Year	English, Chinese	1h
Neil	M	Tanzania	3 Years	English, Chinese	1h
Laura	M	UK	6 Months	English	1h26min
Nasim	F	UK	6 Months	English	2h04min
Alice	F	US	2 Months	English	1h29min
Alyssa	F	US	8 Months	English	1h22min
Anna	F	US	6 Months	English	1h35min
Austin	M	US	1 Month	English	2h15min
Isela	F	US	1 Month	English	1h15min
Kai	F	US	15 Years	Chinese, English	1h17min
Karl	M	US	1 Month	English	1h55min
Awei	M	Uzbek	3 Years	Chinese	1h
Ma	M	Uzbek	3 Years	Chinese	1h05min

Table 2. Profiles of the participant group

### **3.5.5 Interview Process**

The interviews took place between June and July 2017 and were conducted face-to-face and individually. Before the interview, I felt a little concern about language and interview skills, as this can influence the intensity of conversation and reciprocal communication. However, participants' positive attitudes, open-mindedness and cooperation was encouraging, and my confidence was good.

Seidman (2006) advocates a three-interview series for phenomenological interviewing designed by Dolbeare and Schuman. This allows researchers and participants 'to plumb the experience and to place it in context' (p. 104). However, practical issues (e.g. time constraints, accessibility) made this difficult so, I adapted it to a single interview with three stages. As shown in the interview guide in Appendix 9 & 10, the first stage focused on hearing participants' descriptions of life history pertaining to the phenomenon up to the present time. For example, participants' motivations and expectations in light of their CFL learning and IC were discussed. In the second stage, I focused on reconstructing concrete details of participants' lived experience of IC with native Chinese speakers, upon which their understandings and perceptions may be based. For example, participants were asked to narrate stories of the difficulties they encountered in IC or how their stereotyping influenced IC. The third stage involved a reflection on the meaning of experience. Participants were asked to look at their present and reflect on their past experience, which contributed to making meaning of the experience and identifying factors they brought to recent situations.

For example, how participants understood their identities and how identities were reconstructed was investigated by comparing different IC experiences at different stages.

In general, as a way to ease into the interview, I began by asking questions relating to participants' personal background information, which helped them to engage with the interview quickly (see Appendix 6). Each interview ended with open-ended questions such as, 'Is there anything else you would like to add?', which gave participants opportunities to add final statements, which aimed to encourage rich data to be forthcoming (Dörnyei, 2007). Also, they were asked if they were willing to be contacted for further clarification or checking at the end of the interview.

Throughout the interview, three interview techniques were used as suggested by Minichiello et al. (1995), these being funnelling, probing and storytelling. Funnelling relates to opening the interview with broad or introductory questions and narrowing down to topic specifics. For instance, starting with: 'Who do you often communicate with?', and 'What stereotypes did you have before coming to China?', and then gradually funnelling down into the detail by asking a more focused question, such as 'How often do you communicate with Chinese?' or 'How do your stereotypes influence your communication?'. Following these broad questions, probes were used to elaborate participant responses without interrupting the flow of answers. 'What did you mean by ...?', 'How did you think about that?', 'Can you tell me more about this?' were asked to prompt for clarification and further details. This study focused on

participants' lived experience, thus skills in asking questions to encourage storytelling and more elaborate answers was of crucial importance, which is congruent to phenomenological research. Questions such as "Can you recall some unhappy or bad experiences?", "Can you give me an example of that?" "Can you tell me about how your stereotypes influence your communication with Chinese people?", were asked to encourage participants to narrate their story and experience.

All interviews were recorded. A digital recording device was used for each interview as the primary recorder and my mobile phone was used as a backup to ensure that a reliable recording would be available for review and transcription. Hand-written notes were taken while participants answered questions due to a need for clarification or explanation or a change to the order of questions to accommodate interviewees' answers. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and each interviewee was presented with a copy in order to validate accuracy and to provide further clarifications, as necessary.

As learned from the pilot study, I listened more and talked less when conducting interviews in order to make the interview flow naturally and obtain rich detail, these being key features of a good qualitative interview (Dörnyei, 2007; Kvale, 1996; Richards, 2003). To uncover specific and precise information, and rich and significant details, I applied the golden rules of Richards (2003): 'Always seek the particular' (p. 53). Thus, participants may feel at ease to share their views and elaborate on specific issues (Cohen et al., 2007). The appropriateness of venue and environment were

carefully considered. In order to make participants feel secure and comfortable, they were given a choice of venue. I made every effort to establish a good rapport with participants to create a comfortable atmosphere to help them talk freely and feel safe. Participant privacy and comfort are paramount, given that the more comfortable a person is, the more likely they are to share information and disclose the nature of their experiences (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). I had a casual conversation with each participant on the first day of recruiting and used Wechat<sup>3</sup> thereafter, which enabled me to build a connection and to win trust. Participants could choose the interviewing language they felt comfortable with and were able to express deeply and clearly.

As a researcher, I acknowledge the lopsided power distribution between interviewer and interviewee, which may influence the nature of responses and lead to psychological and emotional stress (Kvale, 1996). In this case, instead of highlighting my identity as a researcher, I emphasised my position as an international student studying in the UK, trying to minimise any power distance between interviewees and myself. In addition, I shared some experiences and information with participants when appropriate, which contributed to creating 'a less intimidating environment and enhancing the reciprocal nature of interviewing' (Elmir, Schmied, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2011, p. 3). After the interview, some participants showed interest and curiosity about my studies and my experience in the UK, and I was willing to share my experience.

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<sup>3</sup> Wechat: a popular messaging app

### **3.5.6 Language issues in the interview**

Language is perceived to influence the understanding of social reality, which is unique to individuals' own languages (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010). People with different languages may perceive the world differently as they are influenced by their own language. Accordingly, language influences how meanings are constructed in interviews. Since the participants have diverse language backgrounds and it was important to derive subjective meanings from participants' lived IC experience, they were informed of their right to choose the language(s) that they found easier and more comfortable to articulate their ideas and discuss issues in depth during the interview. Both English and Mandarin Chinese, the languages shared between the interviewer and interviewees, were adopted to capture the richness of participants' lived experience.

Beyond that, 'which languages are in play' in the researcher-researched relationships is an aspect to be considered when researching multilingually (Holmes et al., 2013, 2016). This consideration is useful because the relative status and power relations between two different parties may be mediated by their language choice (Holmes et al., 2013; Scollon et al., 2012). Considering that English and Chinese may be foreign languages for participants, their different levels of language competence might have led to an unequal power relationship. In order to allow participant autonomy and avoid empowerment of the researcher, they were given the freedom to select the language(s). Therefore, for participants whose first language is English, adopting it as

the medium for communication is said to be beneficial for gaining access, creating a better atmosphere for expression, and building up trust and rapport between the researcher and the researched (Andrews, 1995; Tsang, 1998). Participants who came from non-English speaking countries chose to use their preferred language or code-switched, which Baker and Jones (1998) define as ‘changing languages with a single conversation’ (p. 58), to find an alternative common language whenever needed. Respondents and I switched from Chinese to English and back several times, and participants found an alternative common language whenever they could express themselves better in one over the other language.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

I adopted the 6-phase guide for the thematic analysis (TA) outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as the data analysis technique in this study. The following two sub-sections explain in detail the rationale for adopting a TA strategy tool and data analysis process.

#### **3.6.1 Rationale for adopting a thematic analysis method**

As a fundamental method to analysis in qualitative research, a TA method was chosen for this study. The flexibility of TA contributes to providing rich, detailed, yet complex data through identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA matched my analytical aim as it can be a ‘contextualist’ method that works ‘to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of “reality”’ (Braun &

Clarke, 2006, p. 81), which enabled me to actively capture the actual experience and reality of participants, and also the underlying meanings made by participants to provide a better understanding of their experience. The exploratory nature of this study aimed to gain a fundamental understanding of CFL learners' IC experience and their perceptions, an under-researched topic. TA enabled me to actively summarise the key features of data by chunking them into meaningful patterns and constructed themes, which contributes to the initial understanding of issues. Achieving the exploratory purpose of research due to TA is particularly useful when investigating under-researched phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

There are two main approaches to TA: inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An inductive approach is used in cases where there is no conceptual framework or previous research dealing with the phenomenon, so the coded categories are directly derived from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A deductive approach tests an existing theory in a different context, or compares categories across different periods (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It tends to provide a less a rich description of the data overall but a more detailed analysis of specific aspects (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) note that coding and analysis often employs a combination of both approaches because it is 'impossible to be purely inductive, as we always bring something to the data when we analyse it' (p. 58). In this study, both inductive and deductive approaches are utilised. Some code categories related to participants' experience and perceptions of identity are derived directly

from the data, while those relating to perceptions of ICC come from theoretical literature and largely focus on Byram's (1997) ICC model.

The procedures used for coding accord with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of data analysis. To identify themes in the collected data, I captured data with respect to the research questions, which represented some degree of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of identifying themes involved an interaction between examining the data to identify candidate themes in an inductive way and referring to Byram's ICC model as the theoretical framework to identify them in a deductive way. Themes were identified at a semantic level, directly coded from the surface or explicit meanings to the words used by participants in the raw data. This analytic process involves moving from description to interpretation, where significant patterns and implications are sought (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The next section introduces the procedures involved in thematic data analysis.

### **3.6.2 Data analysis process**

After the pilot study, I realised I needed qualitative data analysis software to organise large amounts of data and conduct a thorough analysis. Choosing NVivo 12, a CAQDAS (Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software), benefitted this study. NVivo helped to manage data in an organised manner more efficiently, and, more importantly, helped make sense of raw data and to find themes and extract meaning (Lee & Fielding, 1995). Employing CAQDAS software was the 'best

possible approach to ensure the work is high quality, reliable and exhaustive' (Gibbs, 2014, p. 281). I found NVivo useful and efficient in the process of tagging data into relevant categories, making the data neat and easy to find (Gibbs, 2014); I could easily retrieve data, search for patterns across themes within the data set, which involves an organisational hierarchies of codes. The TA approach is, 'concerned with the development of themes and with analysing data across cases' (Gibbs, 2014, p. 285), and is supported by the functions of NVivo. The process of data analysis began with importing transcripts into the software. I, then followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide as a framework for thematic analysis, bearing in mind that this was a more 'recursive' process than simply moving from one phase to the next (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **Phase 1: Familiarising myself with my data**

At the initial stage, I familiarised myself with the entire body of data by transcribing all interviews verbatim myself.

### **Transcribing**

Lopez et al. (2008) highlighted the significance of verbatim transcription, for 'capturing the richness of the participant's narrations as he or she gives them — is a cornerstone of most qualitative methods, and critical to qualitative analysis' (p. 1736). Although I was exposed to the data when conducting the interview, verbatim transcribing provided a chance for me to familiarise myself further, and to read the

stories and retrieve memories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I therefore transcribed the interviews immediately after in their original language (Chinese and English). I checked the transcripts back against the original audio recordings to ensure accuracy; transcripts were reviewed by reading simultaneously listening to audio files for accuracy.

Interviews in this study have been conducted in two languages; I found that as a non-native transcriber of English, much more time was spent on transcribing and checking the accuracy of interviews conducted in English than in Chinese. Transcribing and checking aims to keep languages in transcripts as near as possible to the original recordings to ensure data trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transcribing is recognised as an interpretive act, where ‘true’ meanings are created (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). This process enabled me to consider the meaning behind the stories, which I had no time to do when conducting the interview, and to recall nonverbal communication and ambiguity in meanings that occurred during the interview. Therefore, transcribing enabled me to familiarise myself with the data from a researcher’s perspective and promoted a thorough understanding of the accounts. Additionally, transcriptions offer a brief critical account of the quality of the collected data. Frequent laughter from both the researcher and participants indicated that interviews can be conducted in a relaxed, comfortable and safe environment. The transcriptions revealed that I was able to build rapport, tolerate silence, and listen attentively.

### **Translating**

As shown, the transcripts are a mixture of two languages. However, in terms of reporting, the study was written up in English. In this case, issues relating to translation are more complex than transcribing and these may profoundly threaten the credibility of data representation, which needs to be considered.

Translation in this study was necessary, though a time-consuming task. Meanings attached to linguistic forms might be different due to the differences between cultures and language systems, so translation from a source language into a target language cannot always perfectly express the intended meaning, which can distort the original emic perspectives (the perspectives of the subjects) underpinning the data and also influence the accuracy of findings. Berreman (2004, p. 185) holds the same point of view and argues that ‘liberal translation of words for objects, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs is often impossible’ because people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds categorise and verbalise their experiences and the world around them differently.

In keeping with researching multilingual practices (Holmes et al., 2013, 2016), I decided to code and analyse the data in the source language, present the quotations from participants in the original language followed by an English translation. Translation did not happen until the writing-up process, which aimed to lower the risk of misinterpretation or loss of meaning, or avoid the potential of limiting the quality of the analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; van Nes et al., 2010). By doing so,

transparency and authenticity are ensured to a degree. This also enables readers who understand Chinese to read the original version, which facilitates the bilingual readability of the study.

I immersed myself in the data through repeated reading of the transcriptions. I read the transcripts actively by taking notes and marking my initial ideas for coding.

### **Phase 2: Generating initial codes**

Once the transcripts of data had been imported into NVivo, line-by-line coding was conducted. In this phase, I coded each segment of data that was relevant to, or specifically addressed, my research questions, in a way which could be labeled as descriptive open coding. Each code referred to a free node with a heading that matched the relevant extract(s) from the data text, which included recurring terms, statements or ideas. Detailed headings were made to depict the main contents of the nodes, employing words that were the same or close to participants' own phrases, i.e. akin to 'in vivo coding' (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 74). This allowed me to recall the main points of the nodes from participants' experiences and their own perspectives without referring back to the original extracts for each specific node. Then I organised the codes into potential and provisional categories. During the process of developing the codes, the complexity of coding became apparent. Some texts attracted more than one code and many were interconnected. An example of the coding relevant to the theme of stereotypes is provided in Appendix 12.

The coding process was characterised by a mix of inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) approaches. I first followed an inductive approach to find information that answered the first and third research questions: *How do learners of Chinese as a foreign language experience intercultural communication in China?* and *How do learners of Chinese as a foreign language perceive their identity?* Carrying out an inductive analysis enabled me to gain access to ‘a knowable world and ‘giving voice’ to experiences and meanings of that world, as reported in the data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 59). In this process, I actively identified features of the data that showed ‘repeated patterns of meanings’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86) or that simply appeared ‘interesting’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It not only enabled me to learn the breadth of the entire dataset, but also provided me with the opportunity to identify the particularities and richness of the data. During the inductive analysis, data was coded to depict the participants’ experiences in their intercultural encounters and how they perceived their experience and identity when engaging with these questions, which is based on meanings contained within raw data. There were no pre-set codes involved; indeed, they were developed and modified when working through the coding process.

During the second round of coding both inductive and deductive coding approaches were applied. In addition to approaching the data with Byram’s ICC model, I also revisited relevant literature relating to IC and ICC. By doing so, I wished to code around and make sense of my analysis of participants’ perceptions of ICC based on their intercultural experience, and answer my second research question: *How do*

*learners of Chinese as a foreign language perceive intercultural communicative competence?* Carrying out both an inductive and deductive coding approach is advantageous because the scope of the inductive approach is broader which enabled me to rethink the data, while the deductive approach is more focused which specifically addresses the research questions while drawing on existing literature.

### **Phase 3: Search for themes**

A long list of codes was identified across the data set after completing initial coding and collating, therefore this phase was characterised by sorting divergent codes into potential themes (or subthemes) and ‘collating all relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89); two stages were involved in this phase. First, I created three folders named ‘Chapter 4’, ‘Chapter 5’, and ‘Chapter 6’ and collated relevant nodes into relevant folders for analysing the nodes further and answer the research questions. ‘Chapter 4’ related to the participants’ IC experience, while ‘Chapter 5’ and ‘Chapter 6’ focused on participants’ perceptions of ICC and identity, respectively.

As discussed, data-driven and theory-driven TA approaches were integrated into this stage. I began searching for themes in the nodes of each folder guided by the research questions. The theme searching process was dominated by a data-driven approach within the inductive paradigm and concentrated on participants’ experiences, including challenges they encountered and perceptions towards IC and identity. Drawing on Byram’s ICC model and relevant theories within the field of ICC, I

identified relevant concepts in order to make sense of any data related to my research questions.

In this process, the nodes I created in the previous stage were constantly re-coded and/or un-coded, grouped and regrouped; potential themes and sub-themes were gradually generated and refined; and, hierarchical data structures were formulated and became increasingly more developed and clearer. For example, I noticed that some clearly fitted together to form an overarching theme. I generated several codes related to students' stereotypes and preconceptions, how they formed, and how they influenced participants' IC. I collated these into one initial theme: 'Stereotypes'. However, a code can belong to different sub-themes, or not fit in anywhere (miscellaneous theme) thus needing further consideration (Braun and Clarke, 2006). After doing this, this phase ended with a collection of candidate themes and sub-themes, and all extracts of data were coded in accordance.

### **Phase 4, 5 and 6**

After a set of preliminary themes was identified in Phase 3, I began writing up my research findings and worked back and forth among my data. I found that the final three phases were more recursive and interwoven, rather than a linear process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The last three phases included: reviewing themes (Phase 4), defining and naming themes (Phase 5), and producing the report (Phase 6).

This process involved: (1) reviewing, modifying and developing candidate themes to ascertain whether the coded data extracts supported each individual theme and each theme accurately reflected the meanings evident in the entire data set; (2) defining and further refining the specifics of each theme to capture the ‘essence’ of each theme through organising the coded data extracts for each into a coherent and internally consistent account; (3) writing a detailed analysis for each individual theme and identifying the story that each theme tells; (4) identifying whether or not a theme contained any sub-themes as part of the refinement to demonstrate the hierarchy of meaning within the data; and, (5) considering each individual theme itself and its relation with others in order to write up a report telling ‘a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell — within and across themes’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92).

I worked back and forth among my data repeatedly; themes and subthemes were organised to tell a logical and coherent story. This complex and demanding process gradually and eventually led to the phenomenon becoming clear. The final lists of themes, including experience of intercultural communication, perceptions of intercultural communicative competence, perceptions of identity are presented below in Figure 4. List of . The results of this process are reported in Chapter 4, 5 and 6 to answer the research questions of this study.

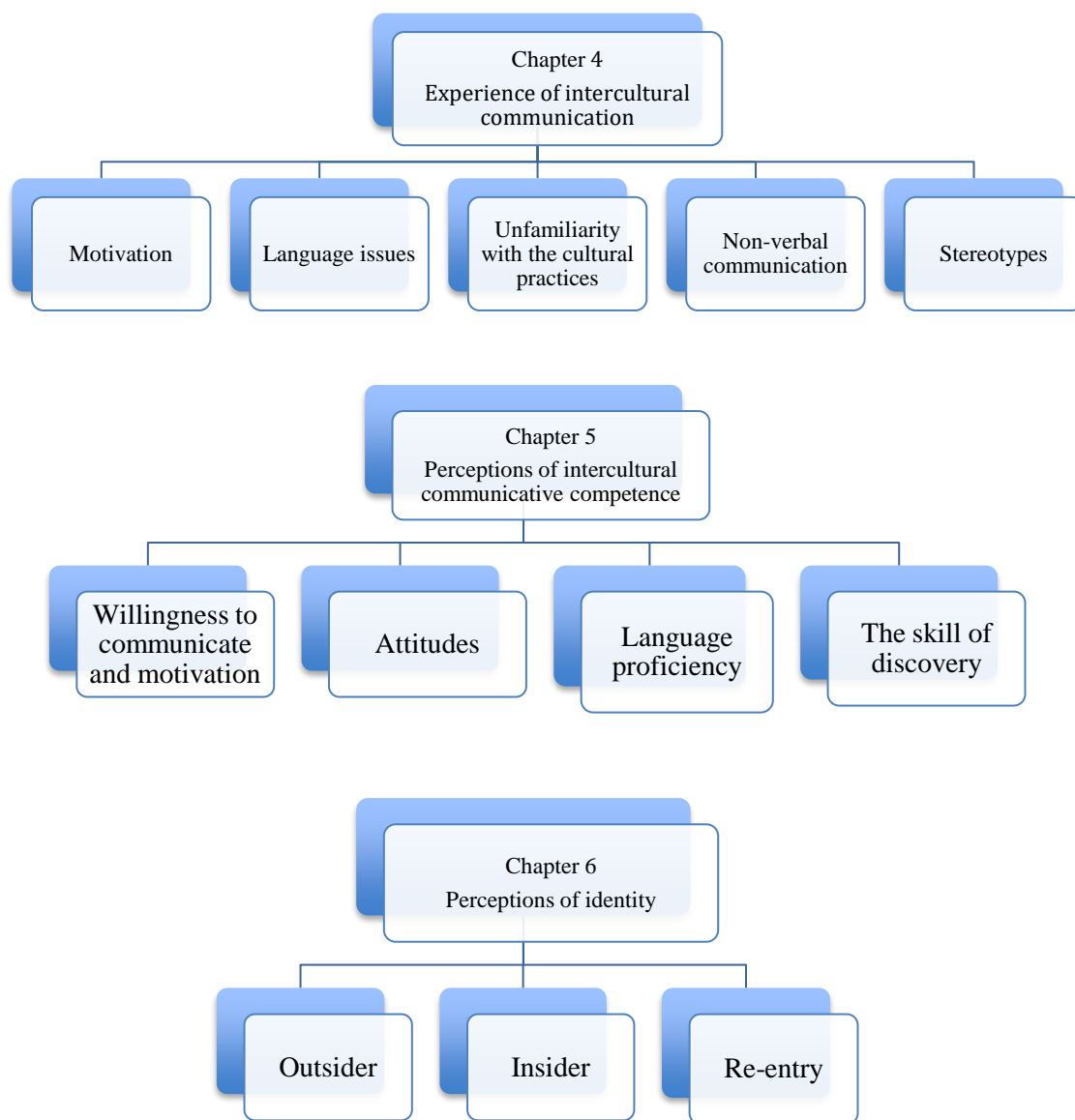


Figure 4. List of themes

### 3.7 Reflexivity

As a major strategy for quality control in qualitative research, reflexivity is commonly viewed as a process of ‘a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher’s positionality as well as active acknowledgment and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome’ (Berger, 2015, p. 220). This, narrowly, refers to analytic attention to the researcher’s role in a study.

Researchers argue that establishing reflexivity requires researchers to identify preconceptions and previous personal and procedural experience that was brought into the project, and how preconceptions and positions affect the process and product of the research endeavour (Horsburgh, 2003; Malterud, 2001).

At the beginning, my outsider identity undoubtedly created some difficulties for me as a novice researcher. One of the most challenging tasks was to recruit willing participants, some of whom did not come on the day of interview, or arrived late, for which I was unprepared. Interviews were conducted in a café selected by participants. Eating snacks and drinking coffee helped to make the interview more of a conversation, which I think is useful in placing all parties at ease and on a more equal footing. It took time to develop my identity as a researcher and significant effort to build rapport and establish trust with participants. Apart from affording them freedom to choose the language and site for the interview to make them feel safe, I shared my personal experiences as an international student, which decreased perceived power distances, enhanced mutual understanding and trust, and made them feel relaxed (Berger, 2013). I felt they accepted me as an international student, who may have had similar intercultural experiences when they said, for example, 'I think you may have the same experience in the UK', 'You can understand this', and felt they were more willing to share their experiences with me because of an assumption of understanding and shared distinctiveness that led to a feeling of 'you are one of us instead of them' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

I adopted the role of a listener to highly value participants' experiences, perceptions and feelings throughout the interviews. I used an open-ended interview strategy to initiate conversations and to raise follow-up questions. This questioning technique creates a more emotionally supportive and less threatening environment, which enabled me to elicit concrete narratives, examples and accounts to contribute in gaining insights to participants' experiences, rather than putting my own ideas in their minds (Neuman, 2003; Seidman, 2006) ; thus, participants were open to share their experience. As a novice researcher and interviewer, I felt more confident about conducting interviews especially when participants were more likely to share their views.

My own IC experience is a double-edged sword inherent in this research. My professional background in the field of IC as well as being a Chinese international sojourning student enabled me to better understand participants' perceptions and interpretations of their lived experience. On the other hand, to some degree, there was a risk of projecting my knowledge and experience into the research process. For instance, when investigating participants' identity change, since 'identity' is a concept that was difficult to define, it appeared that my elaboration about the concept by using examples directed their responses to some degree. They may have been trying to please me by giving answers that seemed to agree with my suggestions. I also noticed that my intercultural experience in relation to accommodation arrangements and activities differed from that of participants. Though I am aware that it is impossible to

shed previous knowledge and preconceptions, identifying this issue enabled me to constantly alert myself to avoid projecting my experiences and to use it as a lens to perceive or understand participants' experiences (Berger, 2013). Reflecting on the process of interviewing, I found that I tended to use 'yes' to corroborate what participants said and encourage them. I also consciously allowed longer periods of silence, in the expectation that participants were thinking and organising their response.

In this multilingual research where there was a language barrier between the researcher and the researched, I acted as a translator or interpreter. Therefore, the identification of areas of methodological concern, and the development of higher levels of ethical considerations that are frequently needed, are reflected in this study (Holmes et al., 2013, 2016).

As discussed above, as participants with different languages were involved in this research, they were allowed to choose the interviewing language that they felt comfortable with, which contributed to building trust (Holmes et al., 2013, 2016). As noted, the use of language indicates participants' relative statuses and is associated with their assumptions about differences. Language choice therefore is a matter of participants' face negotiation (Scollon et al., 2012). Though participants were given a choice in the language, they still encountered difficulties in fully expressing themselves when they were not able to competently use the language. This might have

made them feel a little distressed or embarrassed and may have influenced the outcomes as they felt they were losing face.

The multilingual setting of this research where the interviewing language is foreign to the interviewee or to both the interviewee and the interviewer, is considered to be a major dilemma of data analysis, which relies on translation and interpretation. As interpreters/translators tend to bring their own concerns and assumptions to research, relying on them holds an inherent risk (Temple & Edwards, 2002). It is argued that interpreters/translators are irrelevant if the interview can be objectively translated/interpreted (Temple, Edwards, & Alexander, 2006).

The translator should understand Chinese culture and language well, be familiar with English, and be able to translate cultural meanings from Chinese to English, 'ideally, this relies on not just bilingualism on the interpreter, but biculturalism, so that meanings, rather just words, are being translated' (Green & Thorogood, 2004, p. 121). To avoid the risk of using inappropriate or incorrect expressions, I transcribed by listening to the recorded interviews with consideration of my language and cultural background.

I translated and interpreted transcribed data that were participants' personal stories into an English version, rather than using a technician to reproduce the original into another language (Temple et al., 2006). During this process, I took the context in which the language was used into consideration and also tried to ensure objectivity where possible when translating and interpreting, as this contributes to the best

possible representation and understanding of participants' experience and ultimately to the validity of research (van Nes et al., 2010) This also ensures that translations and interpretations are close to the meaning of participants' words (equivalence in meaning). As such, I acted as both a translator and an interpreter in this study.

### **3.8 Ethical consideration**

*'All research undertaken in situations which involve people interacting with each other will have an ethical dimension; educational research is no exception and the ethical issues are often complex' (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009, p. 489).*

This study adheres to requirements set out in the Department Code of Practice on Research Ethics. I followed the official university procedure for obtaining ethical approval from the School of Education Ethics and Data Protection Sub-Committee at Durham University prior to commencing the data collection process. Due to the fact that ethical considerations pervade throughout the entire process of an interview investigation (Cohen et al., 2007; Kvale, 2007), potential ethical concerns have been taken into consideration from the very start to the final reporting of this investigation. When applying for ethics approval, this included an explanation of the objectives of study, a description of the target cohort/sample, methods and procedures of data collection, data management, reporting strategies, issues of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity.

Clearly, data collection requires much attention regarding research ethics. Three major ethical issues emerged during the fieldwork and data analysis process. These were,

but not be limited to, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and the authenticity of data.

### **3.8.1 Informed consent**

Informed consent, as the most common and fundamental ethical requirement for academic research, is relatively straightforward in my study. When inviting participants before conducting the interviews, I gave a brief summary of my study and how the interview would be conducted and gained oral consent from potential participants and contact information for further time arrangements. Some participants who consented orally changed their mind and did not participate in the interview. As Burns (2000) notes, ‘participants must understand the nature and purpose of the research, and must consent to participate without coercion’ (p. 18). Prior to the interview process, all potential participants were provided a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 2 & 3) with more information and a follow-up Consent Form (see Appendix 4 & 5) once they fully understood and gave their agreement to voluntary participation.

Every effort was made to avoid any form of perceived coercion in planning and carrying out data collection. Informed consent implies informed refusal, which protects participants’ right to freedom and self-determination (Cohen et al., 2007). Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and they had the right to refuse to take part or withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher also obtained permission for audio recording of the interviews to be used for data analysis.

Information about confidentiality and the researcher's right to publish was also offered to participants.

### **3.8.2 Confidentiality and anonymity**

Confidentiality with regard to safeguarding data, the identity of participants and avoiding intrusion into participants' personal affairs was considered throughout the study. According to Wiles et al. (2008), confidentiality is underpinned by the principle of respect for autonomy, in that identifiable information relating to individuals should not be disclosed without permission. This study complies with the BERA's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research and the Data Protection Act (DPA) guidelines of confidentiality and non-disclosure of any distribution of information throughout the entire research process. To be specific, DPA (1998) stipulates that personal data must be adequate, relevant, and not excessive for the purpose for which it is gathered, and must only be used for agreed, specified purposes. This promise of confidentiality protects participants' right to privacy (Cohen et al., 2007). In order to ensure confidentiality of personal information, measures; for instance, the secure storage of data, the use of pseudonyms to protect individuals' identity, from the process of data collection up to the publication of research results, were included. In addition, participants were provided with a copy of a written assurance that audio recordings would be destroyed on completion of the study.

A concept closely connected with confidentiality is anonymity, and is one way in which confidentiality is operationalised (Wiles et al., 2008). Though anonymity is

impossible for face-to-face interviews, every effort has been made to ensure the principle of confidentiality is upheld (Streubert & Carpenter 1999). In this study, information provided by participants was used and reported without revealing their identity (Cohen et al., 2007). Though it is virtually impossible to conceal participants' identities (van den Hoonaard, 2003), efforts have made to conceal their identity when reporting data or individual stories. Before the interview, participants were informed that they would not be identified — they would be represented by pseudonyms. All collected data has been kept as electronic transcriptions in a password protected file and hard copies kept securely (in a locked cabinet). Information on individual identities was kept securely and separately.

### **3.8.3 Avoiding discomfort and giving voice**

Accessing the experience and perspectives of participants' IC was key to this research and required careful attention. As such, it was imperative to create an environment where the interviewees felt safe, relaxed and comfortable to give full voices to thoughts and feelings about their experiences to maximise the quality of each interview. Therefore, participants were given the freedom to choose a place where they felt comfortable to speak freely (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Most of the interviews in this study were conducted in a café in the university, a quiet space, thus free from interruption. I offered coffee or afternoon tea for participants while engaging in conversation to create a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere, aiming to encourage free minds, and therefore to participate effectively in the study.

To minimise potential power dynamics and participants' emotional anxiety, I maintained respect throughout the study (Cohen et al., 2007) and I presented myself as an international student in the UK, to encourage them to share their experiences. Before the interview, we spent time talking to build a rapport. During the interview, I sensed emotional discomfort on the part of some participants, so I took steps to alleviate their distress. For example, one participant felt a little worried about the topic and I noticed her glance at the recorder, so I asked her if she wanted me to turn it off and promised not to use the information. At the end of each interview, each participant was given time to reflect and to comment and give suggestions on the process. They were informed that they retained the right to amend information and check interpretations and transcriptions and were asked if they were willing to be contacted for follow-up questions or further explanations and clarifications regarding their responses.

### **3.9 Trustworthiness of the study**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), criterion applied to evaluate the quality of qualitative research is trustworthiness, which consists of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. A set of techniques, including prolonged engagement, member checks, thick description, and so forth, have been proposed to be applied to establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the following subsections, I describe the strategies that were used to increase the trustworthiness of this study.

### **3.9.1 Credibility**

Credibility, according to Merriam (2007), deals with the question, ‘How congruent are the findings with reality?’ (p. 201). In other words, it addresses the ‘fit’ between participants’ viewpoints and a researcher’s representation (Tobin & Begley, 2004). The following techniques have been applied to establish the credibility of this qualitative study. First, though the period of fieldwork did not last long, I invested a substantial amount of time engaged in the field and with the collected data. I immersed myself in the participants’ world by searching for information relevant to my research to familiarise myself with, and gain insights into, the research context and also spent time talking with participants to build a rapport. Second, credibility can also be operationalised through member checks, as the potential meaning of participants’ words may not always be easily captured. In this process, data transcripts, interpretations and reports were sent back to participants, dependent on their willingness and availability. Thus, participants could confirm whether their articulation was accurately captured and test the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretation of their accounts. In addition, I also include one interview transcript in Appendix 13 for reader’s review.

### **3.9.2 Transferability, dependability and conformability**

Transferability relates to the degree to which results can be applied to a wider population or different context (Shenton, 2004). Transferability is concerned only with the case-to-case transfer of knowledge, and sufficient contextual information on

fieldwork enables readers to make transferable inferences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tobin & Begley, 2004). To establish transferability, thick descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation were provided to allow readers a proper understanding and thereby make comparisons between the phenomenon described in the report and those they have seen emerge in other situations (Shenton, 2004). In addition to this, rich and extensive details concerning the methodology were included with the elucidation of the research process, enabling future researchers to examine whether the results of this study are transferable or applicable to other contexts and settings with other respondents.

Dependability refers to 'the stability of findings of time' (Bitsch, 2005, p. 86). This was achieved by providing detailed steps of methods used in this study to enable the research process to be logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Tobin & Begley, 2004), so that other researchers are able to replicate the study (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability refers to extent to which the characteristics of data collected by the researcher can be confirmed or corroborated by others (Bradley, 1993). This was established by clearly deriving interpretations and findings from the data rather than figments of the researcher's imaginations, and demonstrating how the interpretations and findings were reached (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), dependability and confirmability can be constructed through an audit trail which provides readers with evidence of the researcher's decision-making and selection processes regarding methodological and

theoretical issues (Koch, 1994), and requires a clear rationale for reaching such decisions. Once more, a detailed description of choices and decisions regarding theoretical and methodological issues has been provided above and throughout the study to establish dependability and confirmability.

### **3.10 Chapter summary**

This chapter has outlined the methodological choices made in the current study and described the process of fieldwork. I first developed a rationale for adopting a social constructionist paradigm and then provided a justification for carrying out a qualitative phenomenological approach. I elaborated issues relating to RM-ly, data collection instruments and procedures, as well as data analysis processes, justifying the choices made. Moreover, important issues such as reflexivity and ethical considerations have been considered. The chapter concluded with an evaluation of the study's trustworthiness.

### **3.11 Linking to research findings**

After a detailed description and justification of the way in which I conducted the study, I now turn to the research findings generated from the qualitative data in order to address how CFL learners experience IC and perceive ICC and identity.

In order to answer the research questions formulated in section 2.4, this study utilised a phenomenological approach seeking to investigate the lived IC experiences of CFL learner respondents during their study abroad in China. It goes beyond experience to

gain a data rich perspective relating to how participants understand their experience. Based on students' personal accounts, the present analysis charts their emerging awareness and understandings of ICC and a reconfiguration of their sense of identity. Given that IC experience serves as a basis from which participants build their thoughts about ICC and identity, the findings begin with presenting themes that highlight the nature of participants' IC experience and then focus on the themes that have enlightened their perceptions of ICC and identity, which have been structured into three chapters.

The findings suggest that IC is experienced as a process of development and transformation. Initially at the point when language proficiency and cultural understanding are limited, successful engagement in IC proves difficult. Participants stress that their IC can sometimes pose challenges, leading to difficulties and failures in IC, which is demonstrated in Chapter 4.

The findings show that participants experienced a process of development. They became able to overcome difficulties encountered in IC and more aware of the attributes that contribute to effective IC. These changes reflected participants' development and understandings of ICC. A range of abilities were portrayed as participants' perceived key components of ICC, which are described and discussed in Chapter 5.

Participants' IC experience witnessed a change on perceptions of their identity. They experienced identity transformation from being an 'outsider' to an 'insider' alongside

their development of ICC, indicating their abilities to negotiate a desired identity. This change created a hybrid identity, bringing potential challenges on re-entry to their home country. This study offers a new perspective on how ICC influences the IC experience. The following chapters will illustrate the research findings in detail.

## **Chapter 4 Participants' Experience of Intercultural Communication in the Context of China**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to address the first research question: How do learners of Chinese as a foreign language experience intercultural communication in China? It starts with an exploration into participant motivation, which forms the base and driving force for IC. Then the challenges participants encounter and identify to influence their intercultural experience are examined, synthesised into four aspects: (1) language issues; (2) unfamiliarity with cultural practices; (3) nonverbal communication; and, (4) stereotypes, as discussed below.

### **4.2 Participants' motivation towards intercultural communication**

Motivation refers to 'the reasons underlying behavior' (Guay et al., 2010, p. 712). It is a combination of attempt plus desire that moves us towards a goal (Broussard & Garrison, 2004). Driven by different motivational factors, participants in this study expressed their strong desire to engage in IC, which necessitates foreign language learning aiming towards the ability required for IC. Note that the motivations for CFL learning that emerged from the interviews also drive participants' IC, which by and large divided into two major types: career prospects and integration.

#### 4.2.1 Career prospects in instrumental motivation

Due to China's rapid economic growth and increasing international influence, it is an increasingly attractive business destination (Chen & Yeung, 2015); indeed, many participants indicate their intention to find a Chinese related job in their own countries or in China. Here, a period spent abroad is believed to equip people with the skills and attributes, and the bodily comportment that are highly valued in the international labour market (Ong, 1999), not least the ability to appropriately and effectively converse in the target language. Thus, enhancing career prospects has naturally become one of the main motivations for IC, which further stimulates CFL learning among participants.

Employability concerns take one perspective on motivations, which is the instrumental side to the decision to embark on studying abroad (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Such instrumental motivation is defined as 'a desire to gain social recognition or economic advantage through knowledge of a foreign language' (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 14), which is characterised by participants as a desire or an impetus to learn Chinese for personal advancement, such as a higher salary or better job as a consequence of mastering Chinese. With the concerns for career aspiration, one participant, Tina places high value on IC because she believes it facilitates language learning, which contributes to her career prospects. As she said,

*There are so many job opportunities in China and I want to find a job here. Even if I come back to my country, I think my experience of studying abroad and being*

*able to speak Chinese well can give me more opportunities. So I come here to study Chinese and I also try to talk to local people because I want to improve my Chinese. (Tina, Colombia)*

Tina's case is not unusual among this study's participants, many of whom share the same objective of enhancing employment prospects. To be specific, for Tina, 'instrumental' means 'being able to speak Chinese well' as the base for achieving her desired vocational needs. While, for Una and Akashi, 'being a qualified Chinese teacher' instrumentally motivates them to sustain their effort and be persistent in Chinese learning and IC.

In order to communicate with native Chinese, participants show their enthusiasm by taking part in a language exchange programme; it is significant to note that the majority of participants have a language partner,<sup>4</sup> apart from improving language proficiency, participants also attach importance to understanding Chinese culture, which is perceived to benefit their jobs prospects.

*我有一个语伴，她告诉我很多，不仅提高汉语水平，而且我还了解中国文化，我觉得因为我要做一个老师，所以即使对文化不感兴趣，也需要多了解一些，以后可以教给我的学生。我可以知道中国不同地方是什么样的，那里的文化是什么，对以后有帮助。(Una, Nepal)*

*I have a language partner who taught me a lot. I not only developed my Chinese language proficiency, but also became more familiar with Chinese culture. I want to be a teacher, so I need to know Chinese culture even if I am not interested in it because I can teach my students. (Communicating with her) I can know what different places of China are like, and cultural features there, which will contribute*

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<sup>4</sup> Language partner: also known as language exchange partner, it refers to someone who has complementary language skills and volunteers to chat with in the target language.

*to my teaching. (Una, Nepal)*

Comparing language learning inside and outside China, participants note the disparity between information received. For this reason, and in consideration of future work, they attached great importance to accumulate knowledge and skills, which leads to a strong motivation to communicate with Chinese people for achieving their objectives.

According to Akashi,

*Talking with Chinese people is the best way to develop language ability and to understand China. I find what I learnt about China here is different from what I knew when I was in Pakistan. I think I need to have more contact with Chinese people to obtain more knowledge, so I can give my students the right information about China. (Akashi, Pakistan)*

Further, participants place a strong emphasis on China as the desired place to learn Chinese, as China will afford them a variety of opportunities for IC with native real-world users of the target language, and opportunities to put what they have learned into practice as opposed to the 'at home' context. In this regard, learners who expect to interact with native speakers and perceive this as the most conducive way to learn Chinese are motivated to interact with Chinese people. According to Mike,

*Talk with the local people, you can learn the language and you can learn a lot that you won't learn from the classes, you can know different perspectives. In my country, I don't have many opportunities to talk with Chinese, so coming to China is the best choice ...I will work in China, so it's really important to know Chinese and Chinese culture, this is my motivation to communicate. It is not attainable in my country. (Mike, Ghana)*

Mike's perspective underlines the importance of learning a foreign language in the

target country, which has been assumed as the best learning environment for language acquisition and cultural understanding (Lafford & Collentine, 2006). When motivated by future prospects, participants come to China with a common expectation of developing language proficiency and enhancing cultural understandings. Previous studies have answered such expectations and demonstrated a more significant breakthrough provided to international students in terms of language proficiency (e.g. linguistic knowledge, grammatical competence) and culture learning (Allen, 2010; Dewey, 2008; Isabelli-García, 2006). Therefore, career prospects are a strong instrumental motivation that drives participant engagement in IC, which indirectly influences their decision-making in learning Chinese in China.

#### **4.2.2 Integrative motivation**

As discussed, many participants accord priority to their pragmatic concerns in communicating interculturally, suggesting that international students are often acutely concerned with 'investing qualitatively' in their futures (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 100). However, many other participants show a stronger willingness to engage with the target culture and integrate into the host community. This motivational orientation is termed 'integrative motivation', which reflects a positive disposition towards the target community, accompanied by a desire to learn the target language and affiliate with the members of the target community, and even become representative members of the target community (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006; Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

A basic agreement among participants is reached, in that, acquiring the target language, improving cultural understandings and communicating with native Chinese are the primary expectations of studying abroad. Isela's accounts illustrate how her curiosity about, and interest in, Chinese culture motivated her to interact with Chinese people. With recognition of the knowledge gap between information she obtained in her country and in China, she placed high value on directly interacting with Chinese people to obtain information:

*For a long time I had been curious about China, I wanted to understand the language, the culture and to talk to Chinese people. I don't think what I have learned about China from social media is the real China, so I came here to experience it. I want to talk to Chinese people, so I can know the real China. (Isela, US)*

Moreover, Ana expressed her expectations towards establishing relationships with Chinese people, which is perceived as access to rich information about China. In this case, her ambition to meet and communicate with native Chinese is driven by her motivation towards cultural understandings and social integration. Ana said,

*I really want to make Chinese friends, and want to be involved in Chinese life and culture. It is really fascinating because here I can learn so much. (Anna, US)*

Additionally, many participants are inspired to learn Chinese and engage in IC with native Chinese, which they believe can lead to access to local communities and native knowledge. Beyond that, they are inclined to broaden their horizon and in gaining a variety of different perspectives, which may ultimately give rise to critical thinking and changes in terms of pre-formed stereotypical perceptions.

*It broadens my horizon, my scope. I can get to understand the Chinese culture and Chinese thoughts, we are just adding another form of processing and viewing things. When you see things in their way, you will have less misunderstanding. (Casper, Netherlands)*

*I have a new perspective and I feel like learning about other cultures is a lot easier when stepping back to reflect on one's own. You'll realise some problems are not real problems; they are just the way other people act. (Alyssa, US)*

Particularly noteworthy, is that many participants took a keen interest and intense curiosity in learning Chinese and IC; such favourable attitudes, sincere interest, and desire towards interaction indicates their integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). As Bella stated,

*I've always been curious about China, I want to know its culture. So I make effort to find opportunities to talk with Chinese, to make friends with them. If I have Chinese friends, I think it's easy to involve in them (Bella, Spain).*

It is evident that Bella's Chinese learning and engagement are primarily driven by her integrative motivation. Because of this, she put forth efforts to communicate with Chinese speakers despite encountering difficulties that may be perceived as de-motivational, she said, '*I tried to find opportunities as much as I can, I went to the street to talk to Chinese, it's difficult but it's interesting*'.

This case echoes Kim and Goldstein's (2005) prediction that favourable attitudes, such as interest in FL study, can excite one's interest in IC. Meanwhile, it also offers evidence to support other research (Dörnyei, 2001; Hernández, 2010), suggesting that FL learners with high integrative motivation tend to invest considerable effort and

time in developing language proficiency and seeking opportunities for communicating with native speakers. For this reason, due to Bella's efforts placed on IC with Chinese people, she noticed that her Chinese made noticeable progress. This finding corresponds with the literature, which demonstrates that integrative motivation is a significant predictor in shaping target language achievement (Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003).

### 4.2.3 Change of motivation

More notably, this study identifies a noticeable change in motivation, which has an impact on IC. Carolina, who was initially motivated by her intrinsic interest in Chinese culture, later noticed that Chinese creates many opportunities for employability, which links to a wish to develop a career that involves Chinese. She explained,

*我一直都对中国很感兴趣，我想要了解和智利不同的国家。我想和中国人聊天，多学习汉语和中国文化。我觉得很幸运的是学习汉语给了我很多工作机会，汉语对我来说更重要了，不仅是我的兴趣，因为也和我以后的工作有关系。所以我更要多和中国人聊天，多学习。(Carolina, Chile)*

*I've always been interested in China. I want to know about countries that are different from Chile. I want to talk with Chinese to learn Chinese language and culture. I feel lucky because learning Chinese offers me many job opportunities, so Chinese is very important for me. It's not only my interest, but relates to my future career. So I should interact with Chinese people more to learn Chinese. (Carolina, Chile)*

Carolina's case illustrates a change in motivation from integrative to

integrative-instrumental which reinforced her motivation to interact with Chinese. Likewise, Tanaka's motivation also experienced a change, but the change was from instrumental to a combination of instrumental and integrative motivation. The prime driving force is to attain instrumental aims, and afterwards, a desire for integration, which encouraged him to put great efforts into improving language skills, increasing cultural understanding and socialising with Chinese. Going beyond the above finding, Tanaka's case also demonstrates that being more familiar with a host culture may lead to higher expectations of engaging with local community. Tanaka stated,

我觉得来中国工作是个很好的机会，以后有发展，有更高的薪水。但是前提条件是我要会说中文，所以公司就先派我来中国学习汉语... 了解得越多，我对中国越感兴趣了，我想要多了解一些。而且我想多交一些中国的朋友，不只是为了工作。(Tanaka, Japan)

*I think working in China is a good opportunity for future prospects and gaining a higher salary. As a prerequisite, I need to be able to speak Chinese, so my company sent me to learn Chinese... the more I know about China, the more curious I am and I want to know more (about China). I also want to make more Chinese friends, not only for future employment. (Tanaka, Japan)*

Similarly, Austin's desire to learn Chinese and communicate interculturally displays a change from being instrumentally motivated for a future career to being driven by his integrative-instrumental motivation after meeting his Chinese fiancé, which led to a stronger desire for integration, in his words, '*I want to understand her language, her culture to integrate well into her family*', demonstrating how personal relationships (marital relations) influence motivation. The change on motivation is not uncommon among participants; many start off with one motivational orientation (either

instrumental or integrative) then develop later to a mixture of both, which lends support to Dörnyei (1990) who argues that it is difficult to attribute language learning success to certain integrative or instrumental causes, most situations with a motivational construct include both integrative and instrumental motivation. Given that in this study these motivational factors are also the driving force for IC, in this sense, going beyond Dörnyei's (1990) perspective, IC again is found to involve a mix of each type of motivation in most situations.

However, Polina's case demonstrates a change in motivation from an opposing standpoint, which displays a change from integrative-instrumental to mainly instrumental motivation, as influenced by her IC experience, Polina said,

*When I came to China, I thought that's my country, I'm gonna live here, I'm gonna find my job, make friends, and everything. But now it's difficult for me, and I think maybe it's just for study and I'll return to Russia. (Polina, Russia)*

The difficulties Polina encountered in involving herself in a Chinese community is identified as a specific external cause that negatively influenced her integrative motivation, which hindered her initiatives in interaction with Chinese people, in other words, it leads to 'demotivation' (Dörnyei, 2001). Demotivation, according to Dörnyei (2001), refers to 'specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action' (p. 143). However, she adds if she can get involved, she will consider staying in China for years, which suggests demotivation can be situational and people who are demotivated can be motivated again. Therefore, this study indicates that one's interests, needs and

experience can all lead to changes on motivation, which further influences IC.

Moreover, some participants ascribed their lack of IC to the intense workload that prevents them from socialising with Chinese though they have a strong integrative motivation, which lead to their instrumental motivation being prioritised. For example, Alyssa said,

*After class we have new characters that we need to learn and we also need to prepare a couple of dialogues, and we sometimes do presentations, I don't have an opportunity to meet Chinese people (Alyssa, US)*

Despite their willingness to seek out chances to communicate with Chinese speakers, they noticed that an excessive exposure to Chinese studies inside and outside classes limited their access to IC. Moreover, participants complained that they had few opportunities to meet with and talk to Chinese. In this case, with the consideration of participants' expectations towards IC in relation to actual opportunities for language practice, I suggest that instead of encouraging learners to seek out their own IC ways to meet their expectations, institutions and FL teachers should take responsibility to consider their needs and their diversity to facilitate effective engagement.

Driven by different motivational factors, participants can learn CFL and engage in IC in China. Reflecting on their IC experience with native Chinese speakers, they encountered some challenges, and the following sections focus on discussing these challenges and how they influence IC.

### 4.3 Language issues

Though diverse linguistic backgrounds, the majority of participants of this study have English as a second/foreign language, aside from those who come from English speaking countries; English is often used for communication. Considering participants' language use in daily communication, it is worth making clear that language issues in this research focus on Chinese use in IC with native Chinese. It is hardly surprising that language issues are the most frequently and commonly referred to in the course of investigating challenges participants encounter in IC, which is also studied by Barna (1997) as one of the six main stumbling blocks in IC. Without a common language or having imperfect command of an FL may lead to intercultural misunderstandings.

Despite CFL learning endows participants with a certain command of Chinese, language is nonetheless challenging for IC. According to participants, misunderstandings are commonly referred to as a major difficulty to arise from language barriers. Language differences in regard to vocabulary, pronunciation, dialects, idioms, and so forth, are all sources of difficulties that impede IC (Barna, 1997). Inadequate language proficiency tends to cause intercultural misunderstandings; Wu points out pronunciation as a main cause of misunderstanding in IC,

*Language is a big difficulty as I find that most misunderstandings come from not understanding the language. There are some linguistic problems for me, like pronunciation, the same pronunciation can mean differently and it's difficult to understand. But I think if you learn Chinese better, those misunderstandings will*

*go away. (Wu, Afghanistan)*

Many other participants hold language, the tones in particular, as a hindrance to effective IC. Chinese is a tonal language, so the meanings of words are strictly based on tones. Moreover, a large number of words share the same pronunciation in Chinese, while they indicate different meanings — even the same word may mean different things if used in different contexts. Austin quotes some examples to explain how the use of words, pronunciations, and tones influence IC.

*For contextual Chinese, the same tones or sounds can mean different things. You must know the thing about 小姐 — it has very different meanings. Knowing the colloquial ways of using language is important, because in different contexts, the same word may have different meanings. For this example, if someone uses it in a negative way, it may lead to misunderstandings.*

*...水饺 and 睡觉, you've asked the waitress for dumplings, but she thinks you are asking her to sleep with you. This mistake leads to misunderstandings. (Austin, US)*

Austin illustrates how language problems (e.g., colloquial expressions, misused tones) lead to misunderstandings during IC. As mentioned, 小姐 ('*xiaojie*') was used in the past as an honorific title to address young women with high social status, which equals 'Miss' in English. However, it becomes a euphemistic term contaminated with the implication of pornography, referring to young women who engage in the sex industry, in contemporary understandings. The change of the meaning attached to this example echoes Fowler (1986), language does not merely provide words for concepts that already exist, 'it crystallizes and stabilizes ideas' (p. 18). The crystallisation of the meaning of '*xiaojie*' signals the change of cultural value-orientation in each period of

Chinese history, from respect for hierarchy to openness to the market economy. The colloquial expressions are among the cultural elements, indicating the close relationship between language and culture. The lack of understanding of the meaning in formal and colloquial expressions or in past and contemporary, therefore, could easily cause awkwardness and misunderstanding in IC.

Moreover, Austin's extract also uncovers that tone is integral and indivisible to words in Chinese language system, which includes four different tones that used to indicate different words and distinct meanings. As mentioned, the terms '睡觉' (Sleep) and '水饺' (Dumpling) are both pronounced 'ShuiJiao', but they have different tones: '睡觉' are pronounced with both fourth tones — *shuìjiào*, while '水饺' are both in third tones — *shuǐjiǎo*. Therefore, the misuses of tones may lead to the meanings being changed completely, which is viewed as a crucial barrier to effective communication (Pearson Education, 2010).

Another aspect relating to language and being identified as another cause of misunderstanding, is that the same words can mean different things when used in different sentences or contexts, as Karl remarked:

*I find the same word can be used in different contexts, with a totally different meaning. For example, someone said 我要方便<sup>5</sup>一下, it means one thing, when he asked me 你方便<sup>6</sup>吗? it means another thing, but when he says 交通方便<sup>7</sup>, it means something else. This is very difficult for me. (Karl, US)*

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<sup>5</sup> '方便' is used as a verb, which means 'I should **go to the lavatory**'

<sup>6</sup> '方便' is used as an adjective, which means 'Are you **available**?'

<sup>7</sup> '方便' is used as an adjective, which means '**convenient** transportation'.

‘方便’ (*fangbian*) is a polysemy indicating different meanings. On grammar, a term can be a verb, adjective or noun, and its meaning relates to its position in a sentence. The fact that languages do not necessarily share the same grammatical rules may lead to the grammatical differences across languages, which may cause a problem in terms of the ‘Grammatical-Syntactical Equivalence’, which is concerned with how words are ordered, how sentences are constructed and how meaning is expressed in a language (Jandt, 2010; Usunier, 1998). As indicated in Karl’s case, understanding the grammatical rules of the target language is crucial in IC, based on which, learners can start to understand different meanings of the same word in different contexts. Without this, meanings of words might not be understood, which may lead to misunderstandings in IC.

Serving as a means of IC, translation is perceived as mediation between languages and cultures, where the speech product of one language could be transferred to another language by means of creating a communicatively equivalent speech product (Liddicoat, 2016). However, though translation is crucial, it is always imperfect (Jandt, 2010). Participants noticed that there are words that cannot be translated or indeed even exist in their own language, which may influence understandings.

*The vocabulary like 城管<sup>8</sup>, if I say 城管 to an American, 他不会知道什么意思的, 因为在美国就没有这个, 他不会理解的。你必须解释这是什么样子的工作。很多人解释成警察, 但是是不同的。在英语中没有城管这个词, 就很难解释清楚。(Kai, US)*

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<sup>8</sup> 城管 (*chengguan*) is an administration whose main role is to control illegal street vendors

*The vocabulary like 城管, if I say 城管 to an American, he wouldn't know its meaning because there is no 城管 in America, so he won't understand. You have to explain what '城管 is', what kind of job does a '城管' do, to make sense of the term. Many people tend to translate it into 'Police', but they are different. There is no specific word for '城管' in English, so it's difficult to explain. (Kai, US)*

As Kai said, there is no '城管' in American, therefore it is difficult to translated into English. Objects or experiences that exist in one culture but not in another, may lead to a problem of 'Experiential Equivalence' (Jandt, 2010). Moreover, due to the lack of words in English that correspond precisely with the meaning of '城管', it cannot be directly translated into English. Words that exist in one language may not exist in another, which indicates the problem of 'Vocabulary Equivalence', which may result in a failure of translation (Jandt, 2010). Both problems are barriers impeding IC, and for those who have no precise language equivalent, this would indeed give rise to misunderstandings.

To sum up, this section demonstrates language issues as barriers to effective IC, and participants see their lack of language proficiency as responsible for misunderstandings in IC. Therefore, a strong emphasis has been placed on being knowledgeable about the rules of a standard version of the target language, and the ability to produce and interpret the language to achieve successful IC. This, according to Byram (1997, p. 48), is defined as 'linguistic competence'.

#### **4.4 Unfamiliarity with the cultural practices**

As discussed in section 2.1.1, cultural practices, as the manifestation of a particular

culture, are patterns of social interactions and behaviours, which are viewed as little 'c' cultural aspects and vary across cultures (Weaver, 1993). Coming from diverse cultural backgrounds, participants see that cultural differences are commonly accepted as real challenges that hinder their performance in IC despite these differences underscoring the dynamic and distinct nature of culturally-specific characters. They hold that familiarising with host cultural practices could avoid misunderstandings, conflicts or culture shock. In this case, knowledge of what to do, when, where and how to interact with people in a particular culture in relation to little 'c' culture is crucial in IC (NSFLEP, 1999). Moreover, they uncover the influence of culture on IC in utilising utterances in IC, demonstrating the relationship between language and culture, as discussed in section 2.1.2. In this regard, participants necessitate the ability to internalise sociolinguistic rules for the choice of appropriate linguistic forms in different contexts, which arguably to contribute to IC.

This section has focused on how an unfamiliarity with target cultural practices in relation to language use, challenges IC. Three differences that reflect on cultural values but embody in language are commonly identified, including greeting, addressing and compliment responding.

As an indispensable part of most conversations, greetings are simple and ritualised expressions that show respect, and establish or maintain social interactions. Such expression simply functions as a conversation opener, it serves no informational purpose but is central to all cultures and coined as 'phatic communication'

(Malinowski, 1989). Considering the nature of greetings often used as conventionalised interactions and reflections of culture customs, the ways of greeting vary across cultures and settings, which is a potential source of misunderstanding in IC (Goffman, 2005; Laver, 1981; Liu, 2016). Participants expressed their unfamiliarity with different greeting styles, which brought about some confusion. As exemplified:

*It's important to know the general rules and norms, for example, Chinese normally ask '你到哪里?'<sup>9</sup>, '你吃了吗?'<sup>10</sup> when they greet others ... I was really confused at the beginning, why did Chinese people always ask me '你吃了吗?', I thought they want to invite me to dinner. I was confused until I know they don't really mean to do it. So it's really important to know this, if you know, you won't misunderstand them. (Neil, Tanzanian)*

Likewise, Mike encountered the same problem. Different from Neil who misheard the interaction rituals as assigning the force of the invitation, Mike introduced his encounter with the Chinese greeting style that his misinterpretation of the formulaic tradition made him feel annoying. He said,

*A lot of Chinese ask '你吃饭了吗?'<sup>11</sup> when they see me. I feel it's impolite because every time you meet me, '你吃饭了吗?'. It's like you are trying to tell me you don't have money to buy food, that's what I think. It's annoying. But it's ok now because I know it's the way of greeting in China, it's different from the way in my country. (Mike, Ghana)*

Cases similar to that of Neil and Mike demonstrate how the practice of greeting in

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<sup>9</sup> '你到哪里?' means 'Where are you going?'.  
<sup>10</sup> '你吃了吗?' means 'Have you eaten?'.  
<sup>11</sup> '你吃饭了吗?' means 'Have you eaten?'.

different cultures can bring misunderstandings in IC. Different from Chinese who customarily greet each other with ‘你哪里?’, ‘你吃了没?’, people from other countries may greet differently, for instance, ‘How are you?’, ‘How is it going?’ In this case, participants' inadequate understanding of different types of greeting within various cultures brings difficulties in greeting appropriately in an IC circumstance.

Addressing people in different languages is identified as another noticeable cultural difference that may trigger confusion. Normally, the terms of addressing along with greeting expressions are a sign of politeness (Liu, 2016). It is also an indication of social relationships. Addressing forms, as the reflection of cultural connotations, can be interpreted differently in different contexts. Thus, applying one's own addressing expression to a foreign culture may lead to a person feeling insulted (Q. Chen, 2010; Y. Chen, 2010).

Participants came to realise the significance of knowing the addressing system of different cultures in an intercultural context as the cost of confusions or misunderstandings in their IC experience. Casper stresses the use of honorific appellations to address people for displaying respect and politeness, which seems unusual in many foreign countries in social networking and would be misunderstood in IC. According to him,

*In my country, we address our teachers by their first name, while, in China if I call teachers their names, I think they will be angry with this because it's perceived to be rude. Not only teachers, for people who are older than me, I can't directly call their names, I need to address them appropriately to show my respect. I think it's a*

*cultural thing. (Casper, Netherlands)*

As stemming from different cultural backgrounds and forming in different languages, addressing systems, thus, can be greatly different. Casper pointed out addressing as a reflection of culture saying ‘*it’s a cultural thing*’; in this regard, addressing in Chinese is shaped by the culture (Q. Chen, 2010). Due to deep-rooted Confucius influences, modesty and humility are Chinese virtues, people should respect the elderly and those with a higher status, and cherish the young and those from a lower status, which is reflected in their use of language (Y. Chen, 2010). However, in many foreign countries, a consciousness of equality and individualism is highly valued. As indicated by participants (e.g. Casper, David, Mike), people address directly using their names, which appears to be impolite and disrespectful in China and a source of misunderstandings in IC.

This problem appears to be even more evident and complex in Austin and Natasha’s case because their partners are Chinese, thus they have more direct and in-depth experience of differences. They expressed their confusion about the different ways to address kinship and non-blood, which in turn indicates the importance of knowing how to appropriately address in an intercultural context. Natasha said,

*Chinese have many ways of addressing people, it’s really complex and difficult for me. I cannot address them by their names, I have to address them like 姑姑<sup>12</sup>, 叔叔<sup>13</sup>, and there are even 大姑<sup>14</sup>, 小姑<sup>15</sup>, it’s too difficult. But if I use my way, it*

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<sup>12</sup> 姑姑: Father’s sister

<sup>13</sup> 叔叔: Father’s little brother

<sup>14</sup> 大姑: Fathers’ older sister

<sup>15</sup> 小姑: Father’s little sister

*may be impolite. I wouldn't do this. (Natasha, Denmark)*

When addressing relatives in China, a relative's title is used to indicate their status, while it is more general and ambiguous in other countries, for example, 'uncle' can be '叔叔', '伯伯'<sup>16</sup>, '舅舅'<sup>17</sup>, '姑父'<sup>18</sup>, and 'cousin' seems even more omnipotent, referring to '堂兄弟姐妹'<sup>19</sup> and '表兄弟姐妹'<sup>20</sup>. Chinese has evolved a relatively more complex addressing system, which presents age differences and paternal and maternal relationships; however, people from other countries conventionally use names and directly address their parents' generation, which is considered disrespectful in Chinese culture (Q. Chen, 2010; Pan et al., 2013). As noted, the differences embodied in addressing terms are not limited to linguistic norms, more importantly, they reflect the cultural side. They mirror the uniqueness of Chinese culture, which indicates social relations and politeness, which are signals and reflections of the culture (Yin, 2010).

Another noticeable cultural difference that brings confusions in IC appears in the way in which Chinese people respond to praise and compliments. Normally, as being bound with traditional cultural values and norms, people are expected to perceive and act upon compliments on account of the prescribed strategy in their cultures. In this sense, a lack of knowledge and understanding about it may give rise to confusion in IC. Ye cited an instance to reveal this issue,

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<sup>16</sup> 伯伯: Father's older brother

<sup>17</sup> 舅舅: Mother's brother

<sup>18</sup> 姑父: Father's brother-in-law

<sup>19</sup> 堂兄弟姐妹: Son and daughter of father's brother

<sup>20</sup> 表兄弟姐妹: Son and daughter of father's sister or of mother's brother or sister

*Chinese people are very modest and people in my country seem to be not that modest. In China, when you say like '你很漂亮'<sup>21</sup> or '你很好'<sup>22</sup>, they will respond '没有没有'<sup>23</sup>. But we just say 'Thank you'. I misunderstood it for a long time until I knew why. Now I know this is Chinese culture, if I don't know the culture, it's very difficult to understand their response. (Ye, Bennin)*

According to Wolfson (1989) and Yu (2005), compliment responses are in relation with a reflection and expression of cultural values and norms. Chinese compliment responses are characterised by rejection or scaling down their praise, whereby speakers typically denigrate the object of the compliment to give an impression of modesty and humanity, which are widely absorbed by Chinese as Golden Rules (Chen, 1993; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). The fact that Chinese culture values etiquette and Chinese people lay emphasis on collectivism leads to their self-abasement and tendency to reject compliments (Pan et al., 2013). On the contrary, people in other countries (e.g. America, Australia) do the reverse, they tend to express more appreciation and denigrate less by responding 'Thank you' and they view disagreement as impolite (Pan et al., 2013; Tang & Zhang, 2009). Tang and Zhang (2009) note a tendency of acceptance by Chinese; this obvious difference is still a defining feature of Chinese compliment responses that seem more impressive. Different ways of responding confirm that the use of language is based on cultural and social contexts, thus, to understand a given culture and how to act appropriately are crucial in IC.

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<sup>21</sup> 你很漂亮: You are beautiful

<sup>22</sup> 你很好: You are good

<sup>23</sup> 没有没有: No, No ( But It may mean 'You flatter me, I don't deserve such praise')

The above cases indicate that the connotations and manifestations vary cross-culturally due to different cultural practices and values, which present a challenge in IC (Liu, 2016). From the fore, this study concurs with Campbell (2004) and international students' perspective on their IC with Chinese interlocutors, indicating that culture is central to how people express themselves, so language use in IC reveals cultural differences. This study therefore underlines what is discussed in section 2.1.2, language and culture are inseparable (Elmes, 2013; Risager, 2006). The lack of understanding of a target culture thus may lead to a failure in using FL appropriately, which ultimately appears to negatively influence IC.

Put another way, participants recognised that it is not the linguistic forms, but the meaning — cultural meaning embedded within the language (e.g., the taboos, cultural norms, and socio-cultural conventions) that affects language use in different settings. Familiarising with the target culture enables one to draw inferences from language phenomena as to why people of the target culture speak a particular way in certain context (Song, 2012). This study indicates that people could be encouraged to internalise these socio-cultural rules, and interpret the expressions in a socially and culturally appropriate way, which refers to 'sociolinguistic competence' — a key facets of ICC that non-native speakers have to attend to, without which, there would be poor communication in IC (Byram, 1997; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980). Therefore, participants' experience demonstrates that knowledge about a target culture is crucial for successful IC, which enables people to get the true meanings from the

language, which according to Byram (1997), it is a key element of ICC.

#### **4.5 Nonverbal communication**

Nonverbal communication, as an essential and inseparable part of communication, accompanies speech, or even without speech, contributes to the constant transmission of information, which is invaluable in assisting IC when language barriers are present.

Una, for instance, pointed out that,

*I found even I don't know how to speak Chinese, I can still communicate because I can use gestures, I think even we don't speak the language, nothing can stop our communication. (Una, Nepal)*

Generally accepted, Abercrombie (1968) states that 'We speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our entire bodies' (p. 55). In this regard, a limited vocabulary size or not being able to produce speech can be compensated for through decoding the nonverbal signals or partly transmitting a communicative intention as a gesture modality when necessary (Surkamp, 2014). However, though nonverbal communication can be applied as a crucial strategy to facilitate IC, participants reported their difficulties in interpreting and presenting nonverbal signs, which can impact their IC. Nonverbal behaviours are a mirror reflecting different cultures, due to its incongruity, misinterpretations or misunderstandings in IC are frequently occur (Andersen, Hecht, Hoobler, & Smallwood, 2002). This study found that a limited understanding of nonverbal behaviours leads to misuse and further lead to misinterpretations or misunderstandings, which will be demonstrated from the aspect

of touching and personal space.

The manner of touch serves as a reflection of culture and varies across cultures. In this study, a number of respondents specifically related the issue of touching to a greeting ritual in IC, pointing out that touching could be interpreted as inappropriate when applied to the Chinese culture. The fact that simple gestures of greeting show remarkable variance from culture to culture, participants from different cultural backgrounds have different nonverbal codes, therefore misunderstandings may occur when the codes are used or perceived as inappropriate (Jandt, 2010). Tina and Carolina both exemplified their misunderstanding and misuse of touching behaviour when greeting Chinese,

*If you go to Latin America, we're very kind, we're very welcoming, we kiss, we hug, but Chinese people don't do this. I feel Chinese are really, really cold people, I mean the way they treat people is not that kind, it makes me feel I am not welcome.  
(Tina, Colombia)*

*We kiss on the cheek when greet one another, it's very common. But here, no. (You kissed someone when greeting?) Yes, it's quite embarrassing. I thought they might not like me. Now I know they don't kiss. (Carolina, Chile)*

It is evident that the use of touching varies across cultures and its misuse can generate misunderstandings. As mentioned, it is common to have facial contact in many western countries, while it is considered intimate or even aggressive in China. This could be linked to the concept of 'haptics', the study of the use of human touch. Andersen and Guerrero (2008, p. 162) summarise, 'haptic behavior is the sine qua non of interpersonal interaction in all close relationships and perhaps the most basic and

fundamental form of human communication'. People from different cultural backgrounds may have different or totally distinct understandings, which determine their interpretations of the appropriateness of haptic behaviour (Jandt, 2010). This study demonstrates the importance of grasping the meaning and implications behind the nonverbal behaviours across different cultures for IC.

Another difficulty that participants raised is personal space (also known as 'personal body distance'), which is one of the most common and essential nonverbal communications in IC (Ke & Lian, 2017). Participants, for instance, pointed out, *'Chinese people don't have space awareness, but we place more emphasis on personal privacy and personal space'* (Austin, US). They tend to perceive such differences as culture-bound and highlighted the importance of cultural understanding, *'This is definitely a cultural thing, as I said, I need to understand the culture, then I can understand their behaviours, otherwise, it'll be a problem'* (Anna, US).

Likewise, Kai found that despite living in China for many years, different perceptions of personal space remain a stumbling block. Kai said,

*Personal space is a massive issue. In China a personal bubble doesn't exist. It's ok for people to touch you if you are waiting in public, it's totally ok for someone to sit down very close to you, especially on the subway. (Kai, US)*

As shown in this study, people from different countries have different perceptions towards what is an appropriate distance in a certain situation, whether it is the perceived crowdedness or spaciousness, space-respected or space-violated (Jackson,

2014). The study of people's perceptions and use of space is referred to the concept of 'proxemics', introduced by Hall (1966). In relation to an intercultural situation, proxemics is concerned with the perceptual or psychological space that is culturally defined and maintained through different standards across cultures (Jackson, 2014; Ke & Lian, 2017; Neuliep, 2009).

Interestingly, participants who stressed the challenges to arise from personal space were all from the United States where people feel they have an invisible barrier; they show great respect to personal space and tend to avoid body contact with others to protect privacy (Hall, 1973). On the contrary, Chinese culture is generally perceived as having a higher tolerance to crowded places, while taking little account of personal space (Ke & Lian, 2017). This study sheds light on Gesteland's (2003) argument that what one culture considers to be appropriate might be interpreted as aggressive or possibly intimate in another, demonstrating that people's perceptions of personal space are culturally determined and reflected in their behaviour. Therefore, participants' 'catastrophic' experiences reaffirm the significance in grasping robust knowledge and understanding of the host culture to avoid IC problems.

Apart from nonverbal behaviours, participants identified stereotypes as another challenge, which will be discussed in the next section.

#### **4.6 Stereotypes**

Stereotypes are seen as the 'maps of world', which is often used as a cognitive

structures to help in processing information about the outer world (Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadron, 1996). Concerning the limits in knowing and handling information, these structures are inevitable (Fedor, 2014). However, the presence of stereotypes is a stumbling block in IC; the inaccurate negative stereotyping may give rise to misunderstandings due to the gap between stereotypes and reality (Barna, 1997; Gudykunst, 2004; Zhang & Deng, 2009). In this regard, this study explores stereotypical perceptions of China from participants' perspectives, revealing the sources, determining factors, and the influence of stereotyping.

#### **4.6.1 The formation of stereotypes**

##### **Forming stereotypes from mass media**

The most frequently mentioned source in forming stereotypes is through the mass media, which is overflowing with stereotypes (Plous, 2003). Participants pointed out that information frequently shown on the media becomes the primary basis of their stereotypical knowledge. Jessica, for instance, was so impressed by the distinct and visible differences in terms of physical appearance shown in the mass media, based on which she stereotyped Chinese. She said,

*我在电视看到中国男人有长头发，穿长袍，我以为我会看到。但是，我都没看到，我看到的和我知道的不一样。我想看到有长头，会功夫的。我问我的同学，他们说那是古代的中国。(Jessica, Tajikistan)*

*I saw Chinese men with long hair and wear robes from TV and I thought I would see this here. But I didn't, what I see is different from what I knew. I expect to see men with long hair and be able to play Kongfu. I asked my classmates, they told*

*it's the Ancient China. (Jessica, Tajikistan)*

Jessica's case is in line with Hogg and Vaughan (2010), who highlight that stereotypes initially appear due to a simplified image of a group and its relation to certain attributes, which are often based upon clearly visible differences between people. This study demonstrates that information shown on mass media may limit people's exposure to other cultures and people, and further lead to inaccurate stereotypes. Moreover, the inconsistency in knowledge between stereotypical knowledge received from the mass media and the real target country may negatively impact IC.

Moreover, participants found that their Chinese interlocutors' stereotypical perceptions of them are mainly based on physical appearance and are significantly influenced by mass media, which limits their understandings, and influences IC.

According to Nasim,

*I was born in London, but my parents are both from Somalia. You know, all Chinese think I'm from Africa, I told them I'm from England, they're like '什么,开玩笑吗?' (What? Are you kidding me?) No, you must come from Africa because you're black.' They think all black people are from Africa because that's what they know from the TV, it's their stereotype. (Nasim, UK)*

This case demonstrates that mass media leads to stereotyping, other than this, it could be the product of inaccurate generalisations. Information obtained from mass media may be biased, inaccurate or inconsistent with current realities, which lead to stereotypes, thus affecting IC.

### **Forming stereotypes from social communication**

Participants identified that information received from people based on their experience or perceptions, is another source of stereotype, which is widely confirmed by researchers who find that interpersonal communication plays a critical role in stereotype acquisition, formation and maintenance (Brauer, Judd, & Jacquelin, 2001; Thompson, Judd, & Park, 2000). Moreover, researchers found that impressions formed by second-hand information (being told by others) is more stereotypic than first-hand information (observing by oneself) and they tend to remain highly stereotypic even after direct experience with the target group (Smith, Mackie, & Claypool, 2015).

Wu (Afghanistan) describes his stereotype about China in regard to Chinese food shaped by his brother, which is '*Chinese people eat everything, frogs, snakes*'. However, after he came to China, he found '*nobody eat this. Maybe it's true, but I think only part of Chinese eat it.*' He came to realise that second-hand information was a source of stereotyping and may be inaccurate, which confirms Kashima (2000), in that the transmission of second-hand information can be significantly different from the information obtained first-hand. He further argues that compared to first-hand information that is likely to be more accurate, second-hand information may be biased or inaccurate (Kashima, 2013).

Similarly, Marcus admits that the second-hand information is a source of stereotyping and advocates against the complete trust in others, but rather scrutinise the accuracy of the information instead. With this in mind, many other participants (e.g., Wu,

Tanaka, Austin, etc.) highlight experiencing people in person. According to Marcus,

*If a lot of people tell you the same information that you don't know, you will easily think in that way. This is how stereotypes generated. You must hear a lot like 'My friends are in China, they say...', 'Someone told me...'. They should know what their friends know may be wrong; it may be limited and biased. So, it's better not to trust completely. (Marcus, Sweden)*

However, though some participants' stereotypes are shaped by their own experience, they noticed that their stereotyping has been challenged by their experiences across different contexts. Natasha exemplified her experience in the UK and China in relation to her stereotypes of Chinese students, as follows,

*It is a positive stereotype that Chinese students are very hard working. I met some Chinese and they work very hard, this has already become a typical image of Chinese students, it's a common stereotype. But after coming here, I met more Chinese and I noticed many young people are not that hard working, so I think my stereotype may be not true. (Natasha, Denmark)*

On the other hand, David also categorised Chinese as hardworking based on his social contact with the Chinese, while it is not necessarily perceived as valuable, positive or a highly favourable characteristic when applied to the Chinese. It is associated with another attribute that is synonymous with 'boring' or 'robotic'.

*Chinese people are hardworking, and it's so true. But I think it's like robotic, Chinese are like robots. I know they work very hard, but it's like you do not even look like you have a life. You work all the time. (David, Slovenia)*

Natasha and David's cases demonstrate that even stereotypes can be both positive and negative, which echoes Martin, Carlson, and Buskist (2010), who argue that even though people share the same stereotypical knowledge, they will apply the knowledge

differently. Moreover, David's case indicates the tendency to categorise some Chinese people according to oversimplified standardised images — hardworking, and attribute this characteristic to all Chinese people, whereby 'hardworking' becomes a national character. Whether stereotypical knowledge applies a negative or positive aspect, it is an inadequate way of representing the world and 'dramatically shapes the way we perceive and interact with members of different groups' (Power, Murphy, & Coover, 1996, p. 36) . Stereotypes therefore reflect individuals' different perceptions and can impede intercultural communication.

Admittedly, personal experience forms stereotypes, in addition, participants find their experience might be a source of stereotypical knowledge of others as delivered during social communication. Meanwhile, participants noticed that their unhappy experiences are more likely to form biased impressions or negative stereotypes.

According to Carolina,

*I found my opinions might influence other people. When something, some bad things happened and I told my friends, they might have negative impressions about Chinese people and this might become their stereotypes. You know, I found they're more likely to remember the negative things, so they have negative impressions.*  
(Carolina, Chile)

Social interaction may be a key element of exposure to other countries and people, thus conveying comprehensive, accurate and unbiased information is crucial because it will influence others' impressions upon the target country. However, participants noticed that an unhappy experience was more likely to be remembered than the good

one, which is associated with one of the most basic and far-reaching psychological principles — bad emotions weigh more heavily (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo, 1998). As indicated, information receivers are more likely to remember negative information and form impressions, indicating that negative impressions and stereotypes are quicker to form (Baumeister et al., 2001). Hewstone and Giles (1986) found that people tend to remember unfavourable information about outgroups when processing information. As a result, negative stereotypes and unfavourable attitudes of outgroup members emerged, which formed a basis for negative expectations about the behaviour of members of the stereotyped group. In this regard, the formed negative stereotype will influence intercultural communication with people from the outgroup.

#### **4.6.2 Elements shaping stereotypes**

Participants identified and analysed factors leading to stereotypes based on their intercultural experience, where a number of factors emerged. Among those, the accuracy and richness of information input are identified to be key factors. Natasha placed an emphasis on the accuracy of information by making a comparison between information received about China before and after she has visited; her perceptions of how negative stereotypes had resulted from inaccurate or biased information, as follow:

*I think the way that media reports about China tend to be if not like negative, it's skeptical tone. I mean at best it might be neutral, it always emphasises human*

*rights problem, criminals, rather than looks at the big picture of how China is function like a country. They just pick up some negative aspects, so it's easy to have negative stereotype. It will influence people, maybe among people who don't have opportunity to come to China or met a Chinese person, who are not very internationally minded, they would probably be more affected by it. (Natasha, Denmark)*

Moreover, many participants found that certain access to information solely from a single source is deemed insufficient and may lead to stereotype. They tend to entertain the ideas that stereotypes build on information input, which may be true but incomprehensive. This perspective echoes by Adichie (2009), who argues that 'the problem with stereotypes is not necessarily that they are not true, it's merely that they are incomplete'. For this reason, participants should '*obtain information with various perspectives*' (Kai, US). To be specific,

*One thing may be interpreted differently from different standpoints, so it's important to look into more than one source when gathering information. (Alyssa, US)*

*I think things from the social media are always exaggerated. In my opinion, it's good to know, but do not let it take control over your opinion. You need to be critical, to see things from more ways, from more perspectives, otherwise, you will have stereotypes. (Casper, Netherlands)*

In addition to knowledge, Tanaka found that language and attitude lead to the formation of stereotypes. He pointed out that language sets up a barrier that directly influences IC, which complicates access to other cultures and members of other cultures. Meanwhile, he emphasises an attitude of interest in knowledge and knowledge acquisition. In this regard, from his perspective, people are more likely to

stereotype others due to a lack of language proficiency, curiosity or interest. As he said,

我认为语言也很重要，语言不好你没办法和别人交流，就很多事情不知道。还有就是态度吧，你得要想解。如果你等着别人介绍给你，自己不了解，或者了解不够多，这样都不对，容易形成 stereotypes. (Tanaka, Japan)

*I think language is crucial because you cannot communicate with others if you lack language competence, thus you will lose information about many things. And attitude, you need to be willing to know. If you wait others to introduce to you instead of exploring in person, or what you know is not enough, these are easy to form stereotypes. (Tanaka, Japan)*

Furthermore, Kai entertained the idea that being ethnocentric results in stereotyping. In line with social identity theory as discussed in section 2.3.3.1, ethnocentrism is closely linked to the ingroup favouritism principle. Ethnocentrism refers to ‘a sense of superiority to any out-group and readiness to defend the interests of the in-group against the out-group’ (Summer, 1911, p. 11, as cited in Jackson, 2014, p. 161) and ‘to believe in the superiority of one’s own culture’ (Jandt, 2010, p. 84), which is also a barrier to effective IC. Ethnocentrism is viewed as frequently accompanied by negative stereotyping because of its strong tendency to exaggerate cultural differences; it highlights the most distinct differences and ignores others, and characterises people with different cultural backgrounds unfairly, collectively and negatively, which leads to a restriction in obtaining knowledge of other cultures and limits people’s ability to understand other people (Jackson, 2014; Reisinger, 2009). Moreover, this physical disposition may result in a misunderstanding of others’ values and behaviours, as well

as a lower level of willingness to engage in IC with people outside the 'ingroup' (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). According to Kai,

*我觉得我们国家有的人是这样的，他们觉得自己是最好的，不愿意去了解其他国家，他们在等着别人走到他这来。他们对其他的国家并不好奇，没有很想了解知道。这种想法一定要改变，应该多去了解一下其他国家，不要觉得自己的最好。(Kai, US)*

*I feel that some people from my country are like this: they feel they are the best, and do not want to know about other country, they always waiting for others to introduce to them. They are not curious about other countries, and they even don't want to know. I think they need to change their mind, to know more about other country, not to think they are the best. (Kai, US)*

#### **4.6.3 Problems of stereotypes**

Participants noticed that their stereotyping could reduce the threat of unfamiliarity when individuals face new situations or when situations are ambiguous, as indicated by Carolina (Chile): '*When you don't know much about the culture and people, it sometimes helps you if you use your stereotypes to understand them*', demonstrating that stereotypes assist IC when people have limited knowledge. Barna (1997) pointed out that stereotypes provide guidance and assist people in making sense of the world by categorising and classifying people and situations they may encounter.

However, Carolina noticed that using stereotypes could be problematic when applying to individuals or parts of groups because stereotypes may not accurately describe specific individuals. As she said,

*There might be some problems if you use your stereotypes because they may not be*

*true. For example, if I have a stereotype of Chinese and I think all Chinese are like this without considering the individual difference, but the fact may be most people are not the same, so you see, if you use your stereotypes, there will have misunderstandings (Carolina, Chile)*

Likewise, Tina took her friend's case as an example, indicating that stereotyping is an over generalisation, and the ignorance of an individual may result in a misunderstanding. As she said,

*A common stereotype we have is Chinese eat dogs. But I know it's not a typical thing, it's only a small population. My friends asked me and they were so angry about this. They assume all Chinese eat dogs, and it becomes a negative stereotype about Chinese. But the fact is only a part of Chinese eat dogs, so this stereotype is generalisation and it causes misunderstandings. (Tina, Colombia)*

This study demonstrates that members of a certain group may not fit a stereotype, which may be a cause of misunderstanding when applied to the whole group. This finding resonates with previous research, suggesting that a stereotype is an over generalised perception that is applied to an entire group of people, which is frequently accompanied by prejudice, leading to swift and poor judgments (Hughes, 2017). Therefore, it could be harmful to assume a widely held belief is true when applied to individuals, which may impede IC (Jandt, 2010).

Moreover, participants placed high values on the accuracy of stereotypical knowledge they acquired from various sources due to the fact that inaccurate stereotypes are perceived to lead to some unexpected or negative outcomes. Researchers argue that since stereotypes are based on exaggerated points of difference, they may become a

source of inaccurate or biased information that may distort people's perceptions of others (Houghton, 2014). In the case, such inaccurate stereotypes are perceived to increase the likelihood of framing misunderstanding (Houghton, 2014). Jessica explains,

*Some stereotypes are negative and incorrect, so they may influence the understanding of a country or people. You may not understand it objectively and accurately, I think if you use your stereotype to see others, there might be some misunderstandings I think. (Jessica, Tajikistan)*

Additionally, research results reveal that stereotyping has an impact on a participant's motivation and intercultural experience. Jessica, whose initial motivation in visiting to China was to see the real Chinese *Kongfu* as influenced by Chinese films making, which contributes to a common stereotype. However, due to the inaccuracy of the stereotypical knowledge she acquired from the mass media, she experienced a large drop between the reality and her expectations, which lowered her intercultural experience:

*My life in China is fine, but I still feel disappointed, I thought every Chinese person can fight, I want to see the traditional Chinese Kongfu, that's why I came here. But it's totally different from what I expected. (Jessica, Tajikistan)*

#### **4.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter examined participants' motivation towards CFL learning and IC, and explored their IC experience in China, based on which they identified decisive factors influencing IC aiming to answer the first research question. Being motivated from

both instrumental and integrative perspectives, participants came to China to study CFL, which forms a base for IC. Aside from their motivations, this study reported findings in regard to participants' perceived challenges in IC from four main aspects.

Barriers to IC between participants and Chinese people can be traced to linguistic factors due to dissimilarities in pronunciation, tones and syntax, and lack of vocabulary equivalence, which may hamper meaningful and effective communication. Moreover, the unfamiliarity of host cultural practices, including greeting style, addressing systems, and compliment responses are identified to be other challenging factors in IC, which can lead to difficulties in appropriate behaviour and responding when communicating with culturally diverse people and further lead to intercultural misunderstandings and confusions. This study demonstrated that barriers are embodied in linguistic aspects but rooted in cultural differences, indicating that language and culture constitute an interdependent entity (Brown, 1994; Fishman, 1991). Given language is culturally defined and expressed by linguistic code, this study highlights the importance of being familiar with target cultural practices in understanding how to perform appropriately in FL.

Another identified difficulty is nonverbal communication. Despite its role in assisting communication, it can convey different meanings and not necessarily be understood cross-culturally. The unspoken language of touching behaviour and the use of personal space are identified in this study, which involves different information and interpretations across cultures. Therefore, the misinterpretation or misuse of

nonverbal behaviours leads to intercultural misunderstandings or failure in IC (Arasaratnam, 2007).

Another factor that influences IC is the stereotypical perception. Information obtained from mass media and interpersonal communication form participants' stereotypical perceptions, because visual attributions and second-hand information is more likely to form stereotypes (Smith, Mackie, & Claypool, 2015). Participants came to realise that the lack of accuracy and richness of knowledge, language barriers and ethnocentric attitudes are all factors that may lead to stereotypes. Moreover, participants noticed that negative over generalised and exaggerated stereotypical perceptions all influence their IC.

The abovementioned cases account for how an unfamiliarity with the host culture can bring difficulty in a mutual understanding in IC. For achieving successful IC, aside from identifying the effect of verbal and nonverbal phenomena and alternative interpretations across different cultural origins, weight is given to understanding the levels of formality in the target language, the cultural practices, the nonverbal behaviours, the conventions of behaviours, and the beliefs and taboos in IC, which Byram (1997) referred to as knowledge 'of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction' (p. 58). On the other hand, it also shows participants' ability to identify dissimilar processes of interaction, verbal and non-verbal behaviours, referring to skills of discovery (Byram, 1997). Therefore,

knowledge of social groups and their cultural practices in their interlocutors' countries and the general process of interaction are evidenced as important elements in developing ICC.

Beyond that, the cases reported by participants by and large represent their ability to identify the causes of misunderstandings or dysfunctions in IC, for instance, language barriers, a lack of understanding of target cultural practices, or the inability to behave appropriately. What is more, their explanations of the difficulties with reference to Chinese culture indicates that participants are able to explain the cause through a reference to knowledge of the target culture involved, which, according to Byram (1997), refers to an ability to 'identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present' (p. 61). The ability to interpret a cultural practice in the host culture clearly demonstrates participants' skills of interpreting and relating, which is key in developing ICC (Byram, 1997).

Therefore, it is believed that identifying difficulties in IC enables people to be conscious of the factors that might contribute in successfully avoiding intercultural misunderstandings or confusions for successful IC. The next chapter will illustrate participants' perceptions of ICC based on their reflections and understandings of their particular intercultural experience.

## **Chapter 5 Participants' Perceptions of Intercultural Communicative Competence**

The previous chapter provided an overview of international students' IC experience, the challenges they encountered, and their overall understanding. This chapter aims to address the second research question: How do learners of Chinese as a foreign language perceive intercultural communicative competence? The overarching theoretical framework adopted to underpin the data analysis is Byram's (1997) ICC model, which is used as a means of conceptualising participants' understanding of their communicative behaviour and their perceptions of ICC.

Participants highlight what they retrospectively regard as having contributed to dealing with the difficulties encountered in IC and helping them to effectively and appropriately communicate with culturally different others. These have been subsumed into four aspects: (1) willingness to communicate and motivation; (2) attitudes towards intercultural communication; (3) language proficiency; and, (4) the skill of discovery.

### **5.1 Willingness to communicate and motivation**

Motivation is perceived as a principal determinant of success in CFL learning and IC. In section 4.2, participants' motivation towards IC was discussed with a focus on what specific factors drive their IC and CFL learning; instrumental and integrative motivation are identified in this study. This section examines motivation from the

aspect of how it relates to issues that influence participants' actual engagement in IC.

The results, in accord with Wiseman (2002) and Spitzberg and Cupach (1984), demonstrate that motivation is an indispensable condition in IC, without which, IC will significantly diminish. Motivation to communicate interculturally refers to 'the set of feelings, intentions, needs, and drives associated with the anticipation of or actual engagement in intercultural communication' (Wiseman, 2002, p. 211). A motivated person is someone who has a personal desire to improve communication abilities. As discussed in section 4.2, different motivations drive participants' willingness to seek out chances and initiate communication with Chinese people, this is understood as the willingness to communicate (WTC) (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). This study uncovers strong correlations among motivation, WTC in the target language and perceived language proficiency, adding insight to the current literature (Hashimoto, 2002; Yashima, 2002). Language proficiency, in accordance with one widely accepted definition of 'proficiency', refers to 'what someone can do/knows in relation to the application of the subject in the real world' (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 183). In this sense, it encompasses knowledge and skills required to apply a foreign language for communicative purposes. Figure 5 describes the relationships among motivation, WTC and communication variables emerged from this study.

As shown, motivation and perceived language proficiency are predictors of WTC. Perceived language proficiency is associated with anxiety and confidence in IC, which along with WTC are predictors of IC frequency, which in turn is a predictor of

perceived language proficiency.

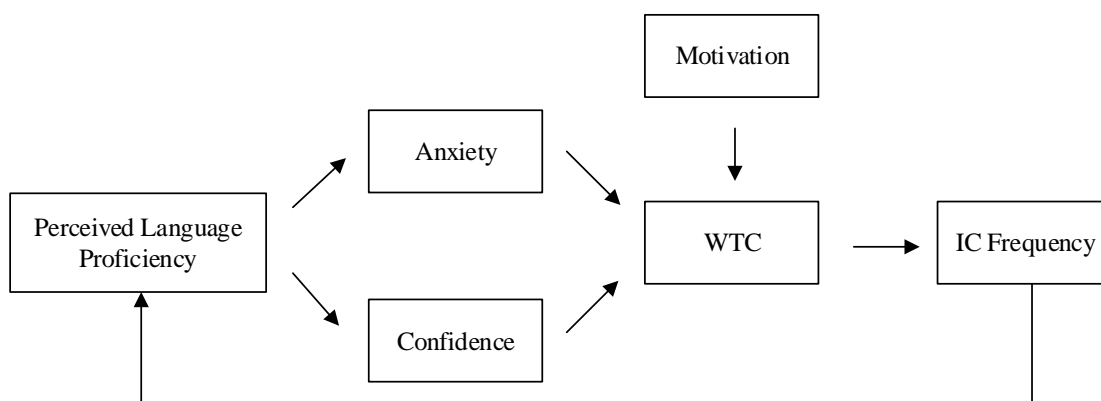


Figure 5. Relationships among motivation, WTC and related factors

To be specific, Awei, who came to China twice, experienced a change in his motivational orientation: from being instrumentally motivated to complete course requirements to a higher degree of integrative-instrumental motivation when considering his career prospects and desire towards integration. As stated, he has a stronger desire for IC and CFL learning, and driven by which, he overcame some difficulties and made more effort to communicate with Chinese people. His case, therefore, suggests a significant correlation between motivation and WTC and a virtuous cycle between self-confidence, WTC and perceived language proficiency.

但是这次我来中国和上次不一样，我学习的是汉语专业，以后我的工作 and 汉语有关系，所以我要学好。而且我也想要多和中国人交流，和他们交朋友，更多的了解中国，所以我尽量多的说汉语，提高汉语水平。我发现我的汉语提高了，我有信心，我以前很担心的，就越来越多的说(汉语)，而且我现在很愿意和中国人交流，现在我都和中国人在一起。(Awei, Uzbek)

*But this time is different. My major is in Chinese which relates to my future job, so I want to learn Chinese well. Meanwhile, I want to communicate more with*

*Chinese, to make friends and to know more about China, so I try to use Chinese as much as possible to improve. I have found that as my Chinese has improved, I feel confident and I use Chinese more. I'm more willing to talk with Chinese people and I often stay with Chinese. (Awei, Uzbek)*

It appears that the main reason behind such a change is a participant's higher intensity of motivation towards IC, which contributes to a stronger level of WTC, indicating a significant positive path from motivation to WTC and WTC to sustained effort in using Chinese more frequently. This finding supports MacIntyre and Clément (1996) and Hashimoto (2002), suggesting a higher level of motivation appears to lead to more active engagement in second language (L2) communication, which refers to IC in this study. This study, as an extension to a wider context outside classrooms, suggests that perceived language proficiency is a predictor of self-confidence in the target language, which is a positive indicator of WTC. However, this study finds that perceived higher language proficiency may lead to greater confidence in IC and appears to be an opposing finding to Yashima (2002), suggesting that the path from language proficiency to self-confidence is not significant.

Similarly, Konishi's accounts disclose the commonly agreed interactive relationship between perceived language proficiency and WTC, as stated,

*我的汉语不好的时候, 我不是很想讲汉语, 就会很紧张。但是我的汉语越来越好, 我就有信心, 越愿意交流。说汉语多了, 我的汉语就越好。(Konishi, Japan)*

*When my Chinese is poor, I'm not willing to talk, I feel anxious (when speaking Chinese). But the better my Chinese is, the more confident I feel and I am willing to communicate. And the more I use Chinese, the better I become. (Konishi, Japan)*

Konishi's case indicates that people's WTC is a motivational property that drives IC and a path from perceived language proficiency to WTC and from IC frequency to perceived language proficiency are identified to be significant in this study. According to Konishi, a perceived lack of language proficiency leads to L2 anxiety, as supported by Wiseman (2002), and is a cause of negative motivation and lower WTC, leading to less frequency of IC. On the other hand, this case observes that the development of perceived language proficiency contributes to gaining some confidence. In this sense, people will experience positive motivation when their confidence is high, leading to higher WTC and engagement in IC (Wiseman, 2002). This study also identifies a path from frequency of IC to perceived language proficiency; however, it is not found to be significant by Hashimoto (2002) and Macintyre and Charos (1996).

Notably, as shown in Bella's case, a perceived lack of language proficiency does not always act as a barrier; indeed, motivation and WTC are identified as encouraging markers of language use, supported in the literature by Baghaei, Dourakhshan and Salavati (2012), which established that some L2/FL learners with a high level of linguistic competence remain reticent L2/FL speakers, whereas those with limited linguistic competence can speak freely. In other words, a perceived low level of language proficiency does not necessarily impede learners' WTC and frequency of IC.

Bella explained,

*I go to the street and talk to people, my Chinese is basic, I can only understand 10%, not everybody wants to talk to me, but I enjoy doing this, it's fun for me... language barriers can't stop me talking to Chinese, this is why I came to China, I*

*enjoy the process (Bella, Spain)*

Similarly, Austin accounts his change in becoming increasingly more willing to communicate in Chinese, despite his proficiency perceived as low, as driven by a higher intensity of motivation. The change of motivation from the initial consideration of anticipated benefits of academic achievement and future career to integration gives rise to higher WTC.

*My initial motivation is towards graduation and for my future career, I learn Chinese because it's part of my course. But you know, my fiancé is Chinese, what happened was that it became ever more required because I wanted to integrate. I have to say I became more active. I'm more willing to talk in Chinese although language is still a hurdle for me. (Austin, US)*

The above cases lend support to Dörnyei (2003), demonstrating that target language proficiency is necessary but not sufficient. In this regard, learners should, not only able to communicate, but also willing to communicate in the target language, which directly influences how frequent they actively engage in IC (Clément, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004).

On the contrary, as mentioned in section 4.2.3, Polina's motivation changed from integrative-instrumental to instrumental motivation, which resulted in a lower level of WTC, which negatively influenced her language achievement. She ascribed her lack of Chinese proficiency to the lack of Chinese use, resulting from a lack of WTC and motivation. Her case confirms the relationship between motivation, WTC and perceived language proficiency from an opposing perspective. As she said,

*It's hard for me to socialise with Chinese people; I am not that willing to talk, so my Chinese language level is still very low. But it's ok for me because I will go back to my country after I finish my study (Polina, Russia)*

Participants have expressed their views on motivation and a willingness to engage in IC, associated with perceived language proficiency, confidence and anxiety, and frequency of IC, which are important contributors to successful IC. This study therefore demonstrates the role of motivation and WTC as important components of ICC. In addition, attitudes towards IC are identified as another key aspect of ICC, which will be discussed below.

## **5.2 Attitudes towards intercultural communication**

Participants agreed that attitude is a major contributing factor in IC, suggested by many researchers who perceive 'attitudes' as an important and fundamental starting point for developing ICC (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2009b; Byram, Nichols, & Stevens, 2001). Based on participants' perceptions, several essential attitudes emerged in this study, namely, openness, respect, readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment and '入乡随俗'.

### **5.2.1 Openness**

Many participants placed a strong emphasis on openness (or open-mindedness), especially when dealing with cultural differences. Openness refers to being open to 'intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, withholding judgment'

(Deardorff, 2006, p. 254), which is the requisite attitude that forms the basis of knowledge, comprehension and skills. In this study, participants perceived openness as 'open to differences', 'change stereotypes', and 'moving from comfort zone'. The following quotes are extracted to illustrate their perspectives.

*It's very important to be open-minded, you need to be open to differences, and this is what I expect to see. If I'm open enough, I can accept a lot of things. So open up to have engagement at a personal level, talk to local people, you can understand more about them, you can change your stereotypes, and get involved. I can see how they see my country. I can also introduce my country to them and change their stereotypes. (Yixiu, Ghana)*

Yixiu's understanding of 'openness' echoes with Byram (1997) who supports: 'interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices' (p. 50). Yixiu prioritises being open-minded and positively regards cultural differences as a learning resource, which contributes to cultural understanding and intercultural involvement. Moreover, he values being open-minded by stressing that the open attitude is a prerequisite in mitigating or suspending stereotypes.

Similarly, Carolina emphasises openness due to her recognition that it negatively relates to ethnocentrism:

*I see and hear a lot of people go to other countries and they complain all the time, 'I don't like this', 'I don't like that', everything is worse than theirs. I think it's bad. You need to open up to the differences and to understand them. Don't think your culture is superior. (Carolina, Chile)*

Carolina's perceptions suggest that students should open up their minds to explore differences from what is represented in the target culture based on the sense that all cultures are of equal importance in IC, which is in line with Byram (1997) who perceives openness as a 'willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality' (p. 57). This is in opposition to feelings of cultural superiority, which may lead to ethnocentrism. Carolina believes that as a result of a failure to be open-minded, ethnocentric tendencies are a major barrier to IC. It may impede one's WTC with other cultures, leading to less engagement in IC. This is problematic for international students because being ethnocentric negatively affects host culture adaptation and the ability to approach and communicate with other people.

Additionally, being open-minded is understood as going outside one's comfort zone, which forms the basis of the concept. Moving beyond our comfort zone and willingly stepping into challenges and of uncertainty is perceived to benefit IC though people may experience discomfort, anxiety or stress initially. Meanwhile, it provides opportunities to experience different perspectives and check previously obtained information. Casper said,

*I think openness is important. We live in our comfort zone, stay in a bubble, but as long as we are in a different country, we need to open up, to walk outside the bubble. We may feel uncomfortable, but that's the price we need to pay, we just have to put ourselves out there. If we stay in our comfort zone, we won't really get involved in new cultures. (Casper, Netherlands)*

Further, participants found that staying in the bubble, not only shows close-mindedness, but also displays a lack of curiosity.

*When you go outside your bubble, it shows you are open, and you have more opportunities to know others. But if you are always in the bubble and you don't want to go to see the outside, incurious about the outside; you will not know what's outside the bubble. (Ruth, Benin)*

Research results identify that curiosity is coded with openness as an important intercultural attitude. Alice (US) stresses that *'I find if you're curious about the culture and the people, you will become more open to know and accept others'*. This research finding is in line with Byram (1997) and Deardorff and Jones (2012) who value openness and curiosity in IC, which implies a 'willingness to risk and to move outside one's comfort zone' (Deardorff & Jones, 2012, p. 287). Specifically, they explained that openness allows for the possibility of seeing people from multiple perspectives, while curiosity lays out the foundation for a more creative way to turn differences into opportunities (Deardorff & Jones, 2012).

Participants stated that close-mindedness acts as a major hindrance of IC. Anna said that close-mindedness resulted in being restricted to one's own culture, therefore she perceives open-mindedness as a precondition of cultural acceptance and cultural adaptation by comparing with hers with her friend's experience, she stated:

*I think the reason I had such a good time here is because I'm open, I don't hold onto American culture very strongly. I have a friend whose American culture is so strong that she left after a month because she couldn't cope in China. So I think, not only being an open person, but also being culturally open is really important.*

*If you don't have an open attitude, and you're not willing to accept new things, your intercultural experience won't be good. But if you have an open attitude, and you see differences when you go to other places, you will easily adapt. (Anna, US)*

Considering that communication occurs between two or more interlocutors, Chinese people as communication counterparts also have an influence on IC. Participants are surprised to find that many Chinese people are very open-minded and show enthusiasm, and they also found people are shy and lacking in confidence, or inactive in IC, which can create a barrier for IC or a tendency to avoid IC. A number of participants (Ye, Tina, Alice) noticed their IC was influenced by their Chinese interlocutors and they proposed a solution by suggesting that their open-minded, curious and proactive attitude motivates and encourages Chinese people to open their mind, show their desire to learn other cultures and establish a friendly social relationship, which reaffirms the importance of an open attitude.

*Some Chinese people are very timid — they are very shy towards foreigners. But actually I find they're curious about my culture and they are very open. They don't talk to us because they are not confident about their English. They told me they felt embarrassed if they made mistakes. So we should be open and talk to them first, and they will be open to us. (Tina, Colombia)*

*Chinese people seem reserved. They open up only when they have spent time with that person. So as a foreigner, I need to show my openness and curiosity to them first, then we can make friends. Otherwise, I may not have an opportunity to make friends with them. (Alice, US)*

### **5.2.2 Respect**

Respect has been referred to frequently in this study as one of the essential attitudes

that should be held in IC. Respect has been included in many ICC related models and theories, which has demonstrated its significance in IC (Chen & Starosta, 2004; Deardorff, 2006, 2009; Fantini, 2000). For example, Deardorff, in her Process Model of Intercultural Competence, regards respect (valuing other cultures, cultural diversity) as one of the requisite attitudes. People from different backgrounds are different in terms of values, beliefs, behaviours, etc., which may bring difficulties in IC. In this study, participants placed strong emphasis on displaying respect when in an intercultural context.

*I think if we are not familiar with the country and its culture we should try to understand. We don't need to agree with the culture, but if we cannot accept, at least we should respect. (Natasha, Denmark)*

*I think honestly be respectful — when you come to a foreign country, you will definitely encounter cultural differences. I think you need to understand them to live in that country. Even we don't understand them, we need to show our respect, and we cannot judge or criticise others. I think only when you respect other people and their culture will they respect you. (Isela, US)*

Many participants placed high value on being respectful when dealing with cultural differences. Specifically, they perceive accepting and following others' behaviours are ways to display respect, demonstrating that being respectful is not simply an invisible attitudinal factor, but embodied in behaviours. David experienced a change when eating with culturally different people as an example, indicating that the willingness to modify behaviour and follow others' ways is a display of respect. He said,

*Chinese people use chopsticks, while Indian people eat with their hands. So I use*

*chopsticks when I'm with Chinese and I use my hands when I have dinner with Indian people. I do this because it shows respect and this can allow you to approach them with ease. (David, Slovenia)*

Una considers being respectful and empathic when using native language for communication, which contributes to establishing a good foundation for IC as it can break barriers and encourage closeness. Una said,

*来中国之前，我遇到中国人，他们和我说我们国家的语言，那时候感觉特别好，特别亲切，我觉得他们很尊重我们。那时我就在想，如果我去其他国家，我也要学他们的语言，不管说的好不好。(Una, Nepal)*

*I met Chinese people before coming to China, and when they talked with me in my native language, I felt so good, so intimate, and respected. At that time I was thinking, one day, if I go to another country, I will try my best to use their language whether I can speak well or not. (Una, Nepal)*

### **5.2.3 Readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment**

'Readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own' (Byram, 1997, p. 50) is explicitly recognised in Byram's ICC model as one of the crucial intercultural attitudes, which is further elaborated as a 'willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment' (p. 50). It is associated with being non-judgmental, another frequently noted attitude in ICC (Chen & Starosta, 2012; Ruben, 1976). In this study, participants' development of this attitude for IC is associated with their readiness to eliminate stereotypes, dealing with cultural differences in a non-judgmental and empathetic manner.

As discussed in section 4.6.3, stereotypes are identified as a major challenge for IC, in this regard, getting rid of stereotypes will contribute to IC. Although stereotypes cannot be completely erased, since they are part of human nature (Sampson, 1999), there is no doubt about the importance of suspending stereotypes and replacing the stereotypical information with relevant observational experience (Kalin, 1984).

Participants prioritised critical awareness of stereotypical beliefs and a readiness to discard for effective IC, which is frequently accompanied by openness, as, discussed in section 5.2.1. They placed high value on personal experience with an open mind to seek out different perspectives of phenomena in the host environment, based on which, they could evaluate and change what was previously taken for granted in their countries and accept new perspectives.

*Coming to China with an open attitude was very helpful to see if the stereotype was right or wrong. I now know about Chinese and China myself, not just relying on inaccurate or negative information. I find a lot of information is not true and I have changed from my initially stereotypical views. (Austin, US)*

*只有我自己亲身感受到的, 才觉得是真正的中国。我觉得也一定要很开放, 不要觉得自己知道的就是对的, 不要有偏见, 这样才能对中国更了解, 就能改变之前的一些想法, 一些偏见。这就是来中国的重要。 (Konishi, Japan)*

*I feel I know the real China only when I experienced it myself. Moreover, as far as I am concerned, you need to be open, and not think what you know is true and also to discard preconceptions when you communicate with others, so you can know more about China and change preconceptions or biases. That is why it is important to be here. (Konishi, Japan)*

In addition to being open-minded and to see different perspectives by direct

experience, it was commonly agreed by participants (i.e., Tanaka, Nasim, Isela) that it is crucial to maintain a freedom from judgment. They placed high value on not perceiving cultural difference as something wrong with judgmental attitudes.

*In every culture, there are good and bad things, and many cultural differences. For me, personally, I want to see the differences. It's not a bad thing seeing so many different perspectives. You can compare them with your knowledge to further understand the differences. (Nasim, UK)*

*There is no good or bad culture, just different cultures. Even though I have my own standards, my standards are based on my culture, so it's unfair to judge your culture based on mine. It's wrong to judge others based on your own culture — you should try to understand them from others' standpoints (Tanaka, Japan).*

The above extracts reveal an attitude that we should not use our own culture as a yardstick to evaluate or judge others. They stressed an understanding of behaviours and perceptions by taking up other perspectives and comparing and contrasting with their dominant evaluations in a non-judgmental manner along with the open-mindedness to cultural diversity. These attitudes could nurture a sense of enjoyment of cultural differences in IC that are crucial for developing ICC (Chen & Starosta, 2012).

Furthermore, participants also placed emphasis on empathy when dealing with cultural diversity and IC difficulties. Empathy is an important affective dimension of ICC, which is described as a willingness to 'imaginatively place ourselves in the dissimilar other's cultural world and to experience what she or he is experiencing' (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 160). It is believed that being able to manage cultural

differences in an empathic manner contributes in creating an environment of mutual understanding and acceptance.

*I often think, 'If I were you, what would I do?', 'Why are we different?' I try to think about the differences from other people's stances and try to find what is behind our differences. In this way, I think I can understand the differences better. (Karl, US)*

*If you don't hold any preconceptions, you will find it's much easier for you to accept different perspectives. When you encounter differences, you will think oh, it's reasonable, there must be some reasons, you know, you will try to understand it. That's really important. For me personally, I'd like to see cultural differences, I can learn a lot from them. (Mike, Ghana)*

The above cases highlighted the need to value diversity, espouse cultural empathy, understanding and acceptance (approval) of foreign cultures, which is in accord with Barrett et al.'s (2014) conceptualisation of attitudinal attributes, demonstrating that such attitudes are of crucial significance in successful IC.

#### 5.2.4 入乡随俗

A unanimous agreement among participants reveals that '入乡随俗'<sup>24</sup>, is viewed as a disposition, a universal rule and a common adaptation strategy, which contributes towards people coping with cultural diversity, intercultural adaptation and integration. Indeed, '入乡随俗' is deeply embedded as a Chinese cultural norm to which newcomers must conform in the target culture, to be respectful, open-minded, to be

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<sup>24</sup>入乡随俗 (Rù xiāng suí sú): Comparable to the English idiom 'When in ROME, do as the Romans do', which simply means, it is sensible to follow the customs of the place where you are staying.

able to adapt and actively integrate into host customs. Deardorff (2009) believes that this old folk wisdom 'necessitates specific knowledge of the host culture and an openness to engage in host culture rituals and behaviors when appropriate' (p. 97). What is noteworthy is that '入乡随俗' is more than a single factor; rather it is a mixture of important factors that are crucial for IC. What is more, it does not solely involve an aspect of attitude — it involves knowledge, attitude, and a strategy for intercultural adaptation. According to participants,

*We should be open to Chinese culture and follow Chinese ways, you have an idiom, '入乡随俗', and it's the same. I am not saying to change completely because there is nothing wrong with being the people we are, I mean it's better to change the way of thinking and behaving according to different situations. (Ruth, Benin)*

*It's like a Chinese idiom '入乡随俗', it's the same way it applies here, when I'm in China, I adjust. To be open to cultural differences because we are here to experience a different culture, so I think it's better to live in a Chinese way. (Casper, Netherlands)*

Considering the research context, '入乡随俗' can be understood as 'When in CHINA, do as the Chinese do', which ties with Byram's (1997) ICC model: a 'readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction' (p. 50). In considering appropriate behaviours when communicating with culturally distinct others, foreigners note and adopt behaviours of the host group they perceive to be appropriate.

Deardorff (2009) understood '入乡随俗' as an adage that individuals should follow to adapt to the host culture. Such an adaptation means to affiliate with the host

community, respecting local customs and investing in learning appropriate behaviour, rather than changing to act like someone else. In line with Dearforff (2009), Neil said,

*I prefer to say that I adapt to the Chinese way of living. When I am back home, nothing seems changed for me because I am back to my previous life. I did not fundamentally change. (Neil, Tanzanian)*

Moreover, participants were amazed to recognise that ‘入乡随俗’ contributed to socialising with host nationals and intercultural involvement.

*The best way to get along with people is to follow their rules. If you do as they do, you can get involved and communicate with better, in Chinese I think it called, 入乡随俗. (Polina, Russia)*

*Learn from Chinese people, follow their rules, as the Chinese say ‘入乡随俗’. If you go to Chile, and you say that in China we do things like this, like that, then you can't get involved. But if you do as they do, they may think you know them and they are willing to talk to you. (Carolina, Chile)*

It is surprising to find that ‘入乡随俗’ is viewed as a process of adaptation, echoing what Byram (1997) mentioned in his model, ‘readiness to experience the different stages of adaptation to and interaction with another culture during a period of residence’ (p. 58). Laura introduced how she coped with her different experience of otherness (e.g. realisation, acceptance, withdraw). She said,

*You have a word ‘入乡随俗’. I found it's a process, I noticed and experienced some cultural differences, and tried to understand and accept the differences, or give up or withdraw from them. Then I accepted what I could follow. (Laura, UK)*

In summary, the findings in regard to attitude reflect participants' understanding of

ICC in terms of an appropriate attitude that should be presented in an intercultural context in order to appropriately and effectively communicate with culturally different others. They necessitate openness and curiosity, being respectful in terms of cultural diversity, a readiness to suspend disbelief and empathetically understand different perspectives in a non-judgmental way, and ‘入乡随俗’ in ICC development.

### **5.3 Language proficiency**

Language issues are a main barrier impeding IC as discussed in section 4.3, which can lead us to be increasingly conscious of the importance of developing language proficiency for effective IC. As stated,

*I think language is the most important, with good language you can communicate with others. (Neil, Tanzania).*

*It's more about the language, the communication. If I am not able to speak with them, I cannot understand what they are talking about. It's difficult to be involved without communication. Especially when I have problems, without communication, I cannot solve the problems. That's why I say it's mostly about the language. (Wu, Afghanistan)*

Participants understand that their CFL proficiency development largely takes place in two ways: inside and outside the classroom, which will be illustrated in detail.

#### **5.3.1 The development of language proficiency inside classrooms**

The classroom is a location that provides foundational knowledge and develops skills needed for daily communication. All participants expect to be competent in the

Chinese language through CFL learning, which is their initial objective of coming to study Chinese in China. As Alice said,

*(I came to China) to improve my Chinese proficiency, and I thought I could have more chance to practice my oral Chinese. You know, it's important for me as I want to do international business with China, so I want to learn how to say things appropriately, and use the correct tones, I just want to work on it and become a better speaker in Chinese. (Alice, US)*

This case indicates that language learners' expectations regarding CFL learning closely relate to their motivation (e.g., career prospects in Alice's case). Expectations have a profound influence on learners' language learning, which is evidenced in research finding expectations of language achievements have an impact on the effort that participants expend and their intention to continue or quit language study (Fernández, 2008; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999). Fortunately, many participants found that their expectations have been obtained. Ye, for example, was surprised to find that her vocabulary and speaking have improved, which partially met her expectations, as she stated,

*My language has improved as expected. I was really shocked after one or two months, I found that I could read '汉字' (Chinese characters) and I could understand some characters when I walked in the street. At the beginning, I understood nothing when Chinese people spoke, but I find I can understand some speech and can also answer sometimes. (Ye, Bennin)*

Wu also reported his language achievements, indicating that Chinese language instructions aligned with his expectations. He listed that, along with linguistic aspects, language teaching also involves sociolinguistics, which together contribute to

successful IC. As he stated,

*They teach some skills of communicating Chinese, and how to use different words in specific contexts, or with some people. 老师还教我们固定搭配或者怎么样表达能表现礼貌, 这些对我和中国人交流很有帮助, 这就是我想要学习的知识 (We also learned some collocations, and how to be polite, which are conducive for IC with Chinese people and this is what I expected to learn), not only vocabulary, but grammar, I also needed to learn how to use language. (Wu, Afghanistan)*

In addition to teaching content, participants also identified that the classroom setting provides an appropriate environment for language practice. With students from diverse backgrounds, sharing different native languages, this learning environment is perceived to be advantageous to language practice and in fostering language proficiency. Various examples have been given to illustrate how a classroom setting contributes to language development. Aisha said,

*I have 16 classmates from 7 countries, Japan, Korea and Australia, Mexico, India and Kazakhstan, we all have different native languages, so Chinese is the common language for us. This classroom setting provides opportunities for us to practice Chinese. It's really helpful to mix students from different countries together. (Aisha, Kazakhstan)*

However, results present contradictions to Aisha's case. Some participants complained that the classroom setting restricts their language development. Tina pointed out that class size, in particular, is not conducive for language practice or developing communicative skills, which fell short of her expectations.

*Chinese language is supposed to be learned very slowly, especially speaking, which needs more practice. If there are too many people, we don't have many*

*opportunities to practice. I think having 15 to 20 students is too many, I think 5 or 6 students would be better. (Tina, Colombia)*

Participants are clear that the linguistic aspect is the focus of formal language instruction, while developing communication skills seems to be less important, leading to a lack of opportunities for language practice. There appears an improvement in terms of linguistic competence, although, in relation to language teaching and learning inside classes, there is a discrepancy observed between students' expectations and real Chinese practice.

*We have Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Comprehensive Chinese every day, but actually we mainly focus on learning vocabulary, grammar and texts. In speaking classes, we just read some texts or keep repeating something. I don't want my classes to focus on vocabulary, or reading texts. I want it to be more focused on speaking; it's valuable to speak Chinese. I know people who have been learning Chinese for a long time, they know a lot of words, but they still can't speak Chinese well. (Alyssa, US)*

Participants further criticised the methods used in language teaching by comparing their language learning with their desired method. Reflecting on previous CFL learning experience, Tina found that the teaching methods contrasted sharply to that in China, she said,

*We are encouraged to speak the language in class, in class we set up different scenarios, and the topics are related to daily life, like how to order food, how to answer the phone. I think language should be taught in this way. I was expecting it to be the same in China, but no, it's totally different, it's PPT presentations, just reading slides. It's very hard for me to learn in that way. To speak, to practice, are the best ways. (Tina, Colombia)*

Tina's reflections of her CFL learning experience are in accord with the findings of Hammond and Gao (2002) and Holmes (2004), noting that different learning styles are applied in Western countries and China. Language learning in a Western country is described as a dialogic learning model, where knowledge is co-constructed through a process of student-student and teacher-student communication (Holmes, 2004). A dialogic language process is 'holistic, interactive, cooperative and diversified, emphasising critical thinking, real time evaluation, hands-on experience and overall education quality' (Hammond & Gao, 2002, p. 228). Comparatively speaking, knowledge, gained through a Chinese teaching approach, is passively absorbed by students, which is described as a more dialectic model where language learning is 'fragmented, linear, competition-oriented, and authority-centered' (Hammond & Gao, 2002, p. 228-229). Language practices and communication tend to be indirect and explicit, which focuses on 'how something is said and on what is not said' (Holmes, 2004, p. 296). As indicated, CFL teaching is centred on developing language proficiency, without considering other skills and abilities needed for IC. Therefore participants are likely to experience learning dislocation due to this distinct difference.

Similarly, David complained about the way CFL is taught in China, arguing that '*Some of the teachers have a pretty Chinese way, it's basically just read the text, then you remember everything, that's not good. I really, really want to improve my speaking.*' He further related his Chinese language experience to how Chinese students learn English, and attributed Chinese learners' lack of English proficiency in

terms of speaking to the teaching method, putting forward that language (both CFL and EFL) teaching in China should apply a communicative teaching method. He stated,

*It's basically how English is learnt here, it is only about how to pass the English exams, not how you actually speak. Most Chinese people learn English for more than 10 years, but their speaking and listening are still not good, it's just as my friend said 看得懂, 可是说不出来 (be able to understand, but unable to say). So I think the teaching methods should be in a more communicative way, we need more practice. (David, Slovenia)*

Commonly participants stated that language practice (or real interaction) involves language learning, which is in accordance with the 'learn by using' approach promoted by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) incepted from Western countries, but unfit for traditional 'learn to use' approach adopted in China (Hu, 2002). CLT proposed that FL learners are communicators, negotiators, discoverers and contributors of knowledge (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Being influenced by the Chinese 'learn to use' philosophy, which shapes perceptions, processes and FLT, it prioritises the mastering of basic knowledge and then how to use it in a creative manner (Brick, 1991). Instead of focusing on 'how teachers and students can create, construct, and apply knowledge in an experiential approach' (Hu, 2002, p. 99), Chinese teachers focus on how extant authoritative knowledge (usually textbooks) can be effectively and efficiently transmitted and internalised (Brick, 1991; Jin & Cortazzi, 1995). Participants' perspectives underpin their inclination towards applying the CLT approach, which emphasises authentic interaction and language use, and is distinct

from focusing solely on learning about the target language (Lightbown & Spada, 1993). Given that language learning takes place throughout the process of communication, knowledge imparted from formal language instruction in this regard is difficult to keep in mind without language practice.

*It's meaningless to just learn the vocabulary, we need to use what we have learnt in daily communication, so that we can know how to appropriately use the words in a given context, with different people. If you want to learn the language, you need to practise, repeatedly practise. (Karl, US)*

Participants' accounts, over and above, indicated that they expect language teaching to be formed in a communicative way, which is deemed consistent with their expectations of FL learning and their conceptualisation of a good FLT approach. Considering the differences in regard to teaching approaches, it is not surprising that FL learners feel that their expectations for IC are not fulfilled. This study, to some extent, confirms the discussion in section 2.1.3 — that the objective of CFL learning is to develop learners' ICC but it is limited to the theoretical level, and not applied to real teaching practice. Therefore, the results identified from this study may encourage teachers in becoming equipped to bridge the gap between expectations and real practice in CFL teaching.

### **5.3.2 The development of language proficiency outside classrooms**

Participants' expectations towards CFL learning is not restricted to language classes, they also place high value on developing language proficiency outside classrooms.

Direct contact with native speakers (NSs) is commonly regarded as a means to develop language proficiency, which corresponds to their expectations and motivations to study abroad and IC with Chinese speakers. Participants generally agreed that,

*I think communicating with Chinese people is very important because we can take what we learn from the class into practice. If I don't have an opportunity to practice, I don't think I will really get to know the language. (Aisha, Kazakhstan)*

Communication with NSs of the target language is useful because it is viewed as a means of practicing productive and receptive skills. To be specific, many participants who believe IC with Chinese is conducive hold that IC is a source of learning, and even mistakes can be used as a learning resource. Alice said,

*My Chinese friends teach me how to pronounce and they correct me when my pronunciation is wrong. When we talk, I learn new vocabulary, how to appropriately say something. This is a learning process and I found my tones have improved, I know how to use the language better; I was really happy about this because it's what I wanted. (Alice, US)*

Alice's account indicates that IC is a learning process, which is also evidenced in Konishi's case. Konishi explicitly makes a comparison between contact with NSs and FL learners of that language and reveals the perceived differences. As he remarked,

*和中国人交流和和我的同学是不一样的，因为中国人说的汉语是正确的，标准的，我们不是，和我的同学讲汉语，有时候会学到不标准的，所以要和中国人多交流，这很重要。(Konishi, Japan)*

*Communicating with Chinese people and my classmates is different because Chinese people speak authentic and standard Chinese, but my classmates do not.*

*Sometimes what I learn from my classmates may not be standard (Chinese) when talking with them, so I think we need to interact more with Chinese people, this is important. (Konishi, Japan)*

Cases like those of Alice and Konishi demonstrate that IC with NSs enriches knowledge of the target language and helps to perfect pronunciation. Direct IC with Chinese NSs sets up a context for comprehensible input that is slightly ahead of the learners' current language ability, which is generally accepted as an essential ingredient for language learning and acquisition (Krashen, 1985). IC with NSs involves a negotiation of meanings, through which NSs adjust and modify the language to make it comprehensible — in this way, language learners can obtain comprehensible input (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Apart from receiving comprehensible input through IC, many participants recognise that their output is also important in FL learning. Participants found that when they come across difficult situations in getting their messages across, they tend to make more effort to be understood by modifying their utterances or using other forms, which promotes language development. As Konishi explained,

*有时候说的话不标准或是不知道怎么表达，就要想办法让别人能听明白，这样感觉汉语能够提高更快，因为一直让自己不停讲汉语，和日本人的话，就直接讲日语了。(Konishi, Japan)*

*Occasionally if I cannot speak good Chinese or don't know how to express my point, I need to try other expressions to make my words understandable, I feel my Chinese improves faster this way because I keep pushing myself to speak Chinese, if I speak to Japanese people, I directly use Japanese. (Konishi, Japan)*

Konishi's accounts are in line with Swain (1985, 2000), demonstrating that 'comprehensible output' is crucial to the development of language proficiency. 'Comprehensible output', according to Swain (1985), refers to 'a message conveyed precisely, appropriately and coherently' (p. 249). When communicating with Chinese NSs, comprehensible output is forced during a negotiation of meanings, which is claimed to be necessary to push language learners to strive towards comprehensibility to the interlocutors through the reformulation of their own utterances to improve accuracy (Swain, 1985, 2000). Comprehensible input alone is not sufficient for FL learning, along with comprehensible output, which together facilitate FL learning and language proficiency development (Swain, 1985, 2000). Therefore, IC with NSs, which involves both comprehensible input and output, are perceived to aid language learning and acquisition.

Participants stress the importance of Chinese interaction to achieve language proficiency and they privilege communication with NSs and devalue communication with non-native speakers (NNSs). They perceive communication with other international students as less beneficial than with native Chinese speakers in regard to enhancing linguistic competence, as Ye explained,

*Their Chinese level is the same as mine, neither of us can speak fluent Chinese without any mistakes. When I say something incorrect, I don't think they can tell me, and I may learn something wrong from them. So I think talking with them may not be very helpful. But I think if I can talk with Chinese people, I can learn from them because they are native speakers. (Ye, Beinnin)*

Ye's perspective counters to Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis, suggesting that, apart from IC with native speakers, students can engage in negotiating meaning in communication with other FL learners; the development of FL proficiency, therefore, is promoted by communication occurring in NNSs. Previous studies have reported the benefits of NNS-NNS interaction, for instance, Varonis and Gass (1985) and Shehadeh (1999) specifically highlighted that interactions among NNSs serve a crucial function, which can produce more meaning negotiation and generate a greater amount of comprehensible input than NS-NNS interaction. Varonis and Gass (1985) maintain that interactions among NNSs provides learners with a non-threatening forum within which to practice language skills and also includes an opportunity to receive comprehensible input. In light of this, this study demonstrates participants' under appreciation of communication with NNSs and an over-estimation of IC with NSs. The disparity between presented research findings and the literature can be explained by Schwartz (1980): 'second language learners of English can learn more from one another than they think they can' (p. 152), which can be applied to CFL learners.

Some participants expressed disappointment about their language achievement. As discussed in section 5.3.1, international students, as the typical composition of the classroom, are perceived to set up a good environment for Chinese practice. Whereas some participants found that they were deprived from IC with native Chinese, and the limited contact resulted in restraining the development of language proficiency. Thus,

they attributes a lack of language development to a lack of opportunities to communicate with Chinese people,

*I don't have many opportunities — if I have more opportunities talking with native Chinese, my Chinese will improve. (Bai, India)*

*'If I communicate more with Chinese people, my Chinese will be better'* — this notion was repeated numerous times during the interviews, which indicates participants' expectation towards developing language proficiency through IC with Chinese people. However, to some extent this is in contrast with Mendelson (2004) and Ginsberg and Miller (2000), from which no direct relationship between how much IC with native Chinese and language proficiency gains has been identified. Further, Badstübner and Ecke (2009) suggests it is the quality and depth of interaction with NSs that can positively influence language proficiency gains. Therefore, in the case of limited opportunities, language learners should pay more attention to the quality of IC as this is identified to be key to language development. In addition to developing language proficiency inside and outside classroom, participants also view the skill of discovering host cultural practices as a crucial element of ICC, discussed in as follows.

#### **5.4 The skill of discovery**

As discussed in Chapter 4, participants commonly experience intercultural misunderstandings that are perceived as a barrier in IC; this section explores misunderstandings through the lens of discovering knowledge of the host culture.

Intercultural misunderstanding is usually considered negative and undesirable consequences, which is construed as an error to be eliminated, but it is impossible to completely avoid in IC. A major cause for intercultural misunderstanding is due to underlying cultural divergences and behaviours that are not recognised to be consistent with one's native culture (Qin, 2014). In line with Agar (1994), this study finds that misunderstandings cannot always be perceived as a bad outcome — indeed, in looking beyond it as a negative end product of a problematic interaction, it can be utilised positively as a resource to examine cultural differences and to understand target cultures. It was striking that misunderstanding is viewed as a starting point, which reveals problems and further facilitates cultural understanding. Marcus explained,

*Misunderstandings sometimes may help with understanding others and other cultures because you can identify the reasons behind them. (Marcus, Sweden)*

Moreover, Jessica's statements revealed that misunderstandings can be a motivation that drives learning, and as a means to improve critical cultural awareness of both host and native culture. As remarked,

*Sometimes misunderstandings motivate us to understand others and other cultures. When I misunderstand, I'll find reasons and critically evaluate them, so I can understand more. (Jessica, Tajikistan)*

Mike perceived misunderstanding as a means to correct the perceptions of people both from China and Ghana. He explicitly exemplified how misunderstanding was used as a medium to deliver knowledge about his country to those who were unfamiliar or

misunderstood it through IC based on his knowledge about his own country, he said,

*I asked people 'What do you think about Africa?' They were like, '非洲人都很穷'。然后我给他们看一些照片，我跟他们说过这个是非洲，他们说这和我知道的完全不一样。他们对非洲有误解，其实是他们不了解非洲。有误解的时候，我就会给他们介绍我的国家，告诉他们你们的想法是错误的，他们能得到正确的知识。(Mike, Ghana)*

*I asked people 'What do you think about Africa?' They were like 'The Africans are very poor'. Then I showed them some pictures and told them 'this is Africa'. They said, 'this is different from what I knew' because they have misconceptions. Actually they knew little about Africa. When there are misunderstandings, I introduce my country, tell them you're wrong, so that they can obtain correct knowledge. (Mike, Ghana)*

This case clearly shows Chinese people's misunderstanding about Mike's country (Ghana) due to stereotypes resulting from inadequate knowledge of Ghana. On the other hand, Mike found that, including himself, many people in his country have misunderstandings about China because of biased information. In this case, the skill of discovering accurate or comprehensive information is crucial. Mike's case also exemplifies the importance of knowledge about both host and native countries in IC (Byram, 1997).

A similar case in this regard comes from David who describes his experience of misunderstanding, demonstrating its facilitative role as a learning resource in understanding host cultural practices. According to David,

*在我们国家，如果是和关系很好的朋友，和她一起走我会牵着她的手，这很正常。但是在中国，我发现只有男女朋友的关系才可以。我不小心这样做了，*

*就有 misunderstanding, 我真的很尴尬。(David, Slovenia)*

*In my country, if I am with a very good friend, I will hold her hand and that's quite normal. But in China, I found that only girlfriends and boyfriends hold each other's hands. I unconsciously did this and there were some misunderstandings, I felt really embarrassed. (David, Slovenia)*

David's experience reveals that misunderstandings that arose through cultural differences improved his awareness in regard to behaviours with opposite genders in China and his own country, suggesting that it is common for people from different cultural backgrounds to behave naturally and take for granted scenarios are different in other countries.

Another aspect mentioned several times refers to Chinese girls that wear an umbrella in the sun, which has been extended to different cultural values across different cultures. According to David,

*A lot of Chinese use parasols. I asked them why, since it's not raining, they told me it's because they don't want to get brown, they prefer white, and white is regarded as beauty. It's totally the opposite in my country. (David, Slovenia)*

In this extract, David presents his ability to elicit new knowledge of a cultural practice from an interlocutor by applying questioning techniques. Such an ability to elicit from an interlocutor the value of their culture and to acquire new knowledge of cultural practices are key objectives of skills of discovery in Byram's (1997) model. Additionally, with the identification of cultural misunderstandings, participants explain different behaviours in China when relating to their own culture, identifying different perceptions in terms of beauty. Indeed, the ability to explore

misunderstandings and dysfunction and to explain them in terms of culture systems present indicates 'skills of interpreting and relating', which is significant to develop ICC (Byram, 1997).

Like David, Anna has had a similar experience in being confused about Chinese people carrying umbrellas. Reflecting on her process of eliminating such confusion or misunderstandings, she provides an effective way of dealing with misunderstandings, which reaffirm the importance of skills of discovery in IC. Ana said,

*I am realising that's just the culture. I think if I misunderstood something, the best way is to ask somebody of that culture (for clarification), or you can find information online. (Anna, US)*

On the other hand, the ability to identify cultural differences and to explore meanings behind them, contributes to elimination of intercultural misunderstandings. Being aware of culture is not always easy because it is internalised in patterns of thinking and behaviours, which are believed to be natural (Stewart & Bennett, 2005). Therefore, cultural norms, social rules and regulations would not be noticed until violated, which is most frequent in IC.

Participants also reported that misunderstandings experienced by others could be utilised as a learning resource. A misunderstanding happened to one of Austin's classmates that enabled his friend to learn the cultural connotation of 'wearing a green

hat'<sup>25</sup> in China. According to Austin, *'that's one of the things I didn't know before I came to China, I learnt from my classmate's experience, his cultural misunderstanding'*. Moreover, *'all of my classmates knew this, as we thought it's good to know because at least we wouldn't give other people a green hat as a gift'*. Similarly, Jessica noted: *'I can learn from others — if I saw someone do something inappropriately or there was misunderstanding, I wouldn't do it next time, I would try to avoid cultural misunderstandings'*. Misunderstandings in this study is identified and demonstrated to be linked to one's knowledge of the host country, based on participants' skill of discovering cultural practices or reasons behind misunderstandings; indeed, intercultural speakers are able to obtain and critically understand knowledge, which contributes to successful IC.

### **5.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter presented participants' perceptions of ICC. Here, four major aspects were identified that influence IC and develop ICC.

Motivation and willingness to communicate are identified to build a good foundation, that not only drives IC, but also facilitates the development of ICC, which correlates with many related components — including perceived language proficiency, confidence, anxiety and frequency in IC.

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<sup>25</sup> In China, 'wear a green hat' is the symbol of a cuckold, which explains why Chinese men in particular do not wear green hats. Wearing green hats in China is no longer a sign of cuckold in particular sense, but a sign of a fool or a source of humour.

Attitudes, to some extent, fit with Byram's *savoir être* and are conducive to their IC, including openness, respect, and readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment, and 入乡随俗. Among these, respect and 入乡随俗 are not categorised in Byram's *savoir être*, they emerged from the participants' perceptions of ICC based on their experience and understanding.

Participants have foregrounded openness as the threshold in dealing with cultural differences and stereotypes. Curiosity is coded with openness, encouraging participants to venture from their comfort zone towards an appreciation of different perspectives. Moreover, they display respect within IC, which is demonstrated in behaviours, which positively contributes in dealing with cultural differences. Further, corresponding with Byram's (1997) *savoir être* of a 'readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own', participants came to realise that it is frequently associated with a non-judgmental, critical awareness and empathy that together lead to a satisfactory feeling and mutual understanding, which is crucial in IC. Additionally, '入乡随俗' is identified and understood as a mixture of more than a single factor. This study highlighted its important role function as an attitudinal factor; along with their understanding and acceptance of the target culture, which contributes to an adaptation to the host country.

From a linguistic perspective, participants value the development of language proficiency that builds ICC, which takes place both inside and outside the classroom. A classroom provides participants with systematic knowledge that forms a knowledge

base, especially at the early stages of language learning and of IC. However, participants pointed out that the class size, teaching focus, and teaching methodology failed to satisfy their expectations of language learning, though they admitted that involving students from diverse linguistic backgrounds in the classroom setting contributes to language development. Moreover, participants value IC with native Chinese speakers outside the classroom in developing language proficiency. They regard IC as a learning process, from which they can learn correct standard Chinese. However, participants' perspectives counter current research (Shehadeh, 1999; Varonis & Gass, 1985), stressing that communication with NNSs of foreign languages facilitates language development.

The final aspect participants placed great emphasis on was the skill of discovery. Instead of solely viewing intercultural misunderstandings as negative consequences, participants illustrated the facilitative aspect, highlighting that they create opportunities for people to check and become aware of any longstanding incorrect understandings of Chinese language and culture. With the skill of discovery, participants are able to acquire new knowledge of the host culture and cultural practices and reach accurate understandings.

## **Chapter 6 The Process of Changing Identity through Intercultural Communication**

Participants showed a reasoned reflection of their language learning and IC experience, which indicates that they have progressed throughout the process in IC. This is not only a quantitative acquisition and increase knowledge, but also a deeper qualitative change of identity. It is through communication with culturally different others that participants come to understand their identity and express themselves to interlocutors. This study adopts a non-essentialist perspective in examining participants' identity, which is unstable. It emphasises that identity is fluid, dynamic and complex as being influenced by cultural and social contexts (Barrett et al., 2014). Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) and identity negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1999) as discussed in section 2.3.3, this chapter examines participants' sense of identity and identity development based on their intercultural experience and how a change of identity impacts on their re-entry, which provides a different lens of viewing ICC.

Three main aspects to emerge from this study are: (1) identity as an outsider; (2) the change of identity; and, (3) re-entry: experiencing the impact of identity change.

### **6.1 Identity as an outsider**

Participants stated being positioned as an outsider, which influences their IC and

development of ICC. They identified the main reasons ascribed to such a categorisation: 1) physical appearance; 2) lack of language proficiency; and, 3) participation in intercultural communication.

### **6.1.1 Physical appearance**

Physical appearance, as a powerful signal, impacts ones' perceptions towards others, how approachable they are and how to communicate with them (Richmond & McCroskey, 2004). As suggested by social identity theory, physical appearances categorise people into certain groups, which is a factor that 'enter(s) into the cultural identity construction equation' and associated with the treatment one received by others (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Participants may attempt to pass into a dominant group; however, their physical appearance sets a boundary and a barrier to IC, which leads to difficulties in blending into the target community.

Jessica is studying towards a Master's degree in China while studying Chinese, so differs from most participants — her classmates are mostly Chinese in some her courses. Having classes with Chinese, she has found that her remarkable physical appearance has defined her as an outsider that cuts off her access and involvement to Chinese speakers, which leads to a strong feeling of isolation. Meanwhile, she has found that differences in physical appearance discourage IC, which confirms Byrne's (1971) view; the higher the perceived similarity between two individuals, the greater their attraction to each other to communicate and vice versa. According to Jessica,

我觉得他们觉得我是不一样的，衣服，外表，各个方面都是不一样的。在课堂上，我和我的中国同学坐在一起。但是只有我是不同的。我感觉到他们对我不同的，我觉得他们有的时候把我分开。 (Jessica, Tajikistan)

*I feel they think I am different in terms of clothes, appearance, etc. I sit together with my Chinese classmates in classes, but only I stand out. I feel they treat me differently because they divide me sometimes. (Jessica, Tajikistan)*

Like the majority of their peers, Nasim and Yixiu felt excluded sometimes because of the reactions from locals, which is attributed to their physical appearance. Coming from Ghana (Yixiu) and born in a Somalian family (Nasim), the presence of black skin colour and braided hairstyle makes their difference very visible. They recalled an uncomfortable encounter and shared their feelings,

*It's very uncomfortable, 'oh, you are so different from me', 'I want to touch your hair', 'I want to touch your skin', it's annoying ..... this evoked a stronger feeling that I'm different (Nasim, UK)*

*Sometimes I feel I don't belong, I am excluded ..... when I'm walking, people take pictures of me, that is so impolite but it happens a lot. I know I'm a foreigner but it makes me feel so uncomfortable. (Yixiu, Ghana)*

These cases shed light on Jackson's (2008) study, suggesting that a distinct physical appearance can bring difficulty to incoming students for integration, which might trigger incidents that would impact identity. In addition to the above cases, many other participants expressed their frustration of being indexed as foreign, or minorities due to their obvious otherness, and they even felt excluded from locals. For instance, Laura told her experience and that of her friend and highlighted that difference, as signified by their physical appearance, undoubtedly had a major impact on IC and

further on their perception of identity. According to Laura,

*My friend Nancy, she is black, when we're together, people would come up to me and cut her off... I think if Nancy was white and I was black, they would cut me off and talk to her. I know a lot of people prefer white, you think white is beauty. But it makes us feel uncomfortable because she is excluded. (Laura, UK)*

Nancy's case highlights that though foreigners are all different in physical appearance, some with certain features are treated differently. Laura ascribed the differential treatment to '*she is black*', indicating that people are positioned in a hierarchy wherein their physical appearance as an ethnic marker clearly affects the attitudes of some. This results in being separated from locals and unable to be immersed in the target community, further influences their identity and IC (Block, 2014; Kim, 2001; Kinginger, 2008).

Though being indexed as foreigners, many participants, i.e. Carolina and Yixiu, found that they could overcome physical appearance barriers by making use of such a reception to gain access to locals. They realised others' perceptions or reactions might not always create a disadvantages in accessing locals; their foreign identity could be used as a pointcut instead. Yixiu stated how he 'positively' employed his different and outstanding appearance as a means to communicate with Chinese. As stated,

*It happens a lot; children ask me 'Why are you so black?' sometimes their parents get embarrassed. But it's fine for me, I think they are just curious about me. I remember there was a very small boy, he asked me '为什么是黑色的? 你没洗澡吗?' (Why is it black? Haven't you had a bath?). I explained to him in a very funny way. I can understand people feel angry about it, but for me I prefer to think*

*it's ignorance, and I can tell them if they don't know. (Yixiu, Ghana)*

This case illustrates how Yixiu assisted interlocutors to overcome their incorrect perceptions through an explanation of sources of misunderstandings based on his positive attitude towards confusion along with his ability to ‘mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena’ (Byram, 1997, p. 61). This is an important skill — interpreting and relating, being included as a key component of Byram’s ICC model. This finding sheds lights on previous researches (Du, 2015; Trentman, 2012) demonstrating that physical characteristics that can be used to define one’s identity, do not always negatively impact on IC, instead it can be turned to an advantage. The interlocutors’ curiosity, interests and questions could be used as a conversation opener, and international students’ skills in the local language and ability to help interlocutors overcome misunderstandings could then lead to hosts’ subsequent curiosity and more conversation and understanding. In other words, this study demonstrates that the ICC has the potential to contribute to eliminating identity boundaries.

### **6.1.2 The lack of language proficiency**

This study has validated the view that language barriers in IC appear to be one of the most cited challenging stressors confronted by international students; it hinders them in establishing friendships with host-national counterparts and impacts their sense of belonging or alliance (Sias et al., 2008; Volet & Ang, 1998; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), identity is in part derived from social networks based on friendships, family, and so forth, to

which individuals belong. Participants strongly voiced that the formation of relationships is a major concern and is less likely to be satisfied, which is mainly ascribed to a lack of language proficiency. Neil exemplified his experience of his first year in China.

*I rarely talked with Chinese, I wanted to make friends, but I couldn't because my Chinese was bad. When I speak some Chinese, I find it's still difficult to make friends because my Chinese is not good enough to have a deep conversation. Just think when you and Chinese can't understand each other, how can you make friends? At that time, I was an outsider, I was not involved. (Neil, Tanzanian)*

Neil's experience ties in with Sias et al.'s (2008) research findings, indicating that language barriers slow down the increase of the breadth and depth of conversation needed for establishing and developing friendships. In this case, participants' outsider identity tended to emerge from their Chinese interlocutors and their own stance. Una agreed that the lack of proficiency in Chinese led to a difficulty in being accepted by hosts. She ascribed how she perceived local people's unwillingness to form friendships with her because they did not share a common language, which further impacted her intercultural integration and sense of belonging. As she said,

*I feel Chinese people don't want to make friends with people like me who can't speak Chinese well. So it is difficult to make friends and get involved, which makes me feel I am a foreigner, of course I am a foreigner, but I feel excluded. (Una, Nepal)*

Studies have demonstrated that home students are generally found to be well-disposed towards their international peers regardless of the stereotypical assumptions held

about them; however, IC between host and international students are noted to be uncommon (Halualani, 2008; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). One reason uncovered in this study is in line with previous research that has investigated interactions between domestic and international students, noting that the main reason that domestic students are reluctant to initiate the forming of friendships with international students is the language barrier (Ippolito, 2007; Jon, 2013). More importantly, Una's concern has been confirmed by Bird and Holmes' (2005) study, which investigates domestic students' IC experience with international students, demonstrating that international students' difficulties in the target language reduces native speakers' engagement and interaction with them.

Moreover, Awei provided a strong example that illustrates the relationship between perceived language proficiency and identity. He identified language barrier as a noted factor which led him away from domestic students. Awei came to China twice and created an Uzbek-only community while holding onto their own language for communication. In this case, his Uzbek background was in the foreground. He therefore felt more connected to his home cultural identity and was excluded from the Chinese community as his sense of identity was strongly tied to home. He attributed his reticence in socialising with Chinese and his failure in making Chinese friends to his perceived imperfect language proficiency presented in IC. In retrospect, he said,

*第一次来中国是学习汉语，我的朋友都是我们国家的。因为我的汉语不好，我没信心，讲汉语的时候很紧张。我担心说的话是不对的，不是很想和中国人聊天，也没有交到中国朋友...我的身边都是中国人，但是我没有中国人的*

朋友，就会觉得自己是不一样的，有种(被)孤立的感觉。(Awei, Uzbek)

*The first time I came to China was to learn Chinese. At that time, all my friends were from Uzbekistan. I had no confidence and felt nervous when speaking Chinese because my Chinese was not good. I worried about saying something incorrect, so I didn't want to talk with Chinese and I had no Chinese friends... being surrounded by Chinese people without having any Chinese friends makes me feel different and isolated. (Awei, Uzbek)*

The above cases indicate that participants' concerns about perceived low level of language proficiency gave rise to their failure in forming friendships, without which they tend to have a sense of exclusion, unable to integrate. This is consistent with Ting-Toomey's (2005), where newcomers may lose confidence in their host language proficiency when surrounded by native speakers in the host environment. In this case, they may continuously perceive themselves as an outsider, feeling a low of belonging to the host community. This study uncovers a unanimous perception that language proficiency provides a barrier to friendship with native speakers in IC, which creates a sense of belonging, to which identity is attached (Duck, 2002).

### **6.1.3 Participation in intercultural communication**

This study uncovers a relationship between participation in IC and identity, where participants experienced a heightening of their cultural identity when they had fewer opportunities for IC. Many participants expressed their desire to be in a group with Chinese people, expecting to obtain more opportunities to communicate. However, it quickly emerged that they are reluctant to talk to local people; instead, they tended to

socialise with international students, which increased their identification with other international students rather than the host community. Ma recalled the experience of his first days in China, and at the time he perceived himself as an outsider, as he said,

*刚来的时候，我的汉语不好，我不敢和中国人聊天，也不是很想说。有的时候不得不说，就很紧张，很担心出错，即使知道我应该要多和中国人说话，但是我没有信心，所以我更喜欢和其他留学生一起，但是这样的话就和中国人分开的，很难融入。(Ma, Uzbek)*

*During my first days in China, my Chinese was not good. I was afraid of talking Chinese, and was also unwilling to talk to them. I felt nervous when I had to speak Chinese, I was afraid of making mistakes, though I know I should communicate more, but I don't have confidence. So I preferred to stay with other international students, which led to being separated from Chinese people and faced more difficulties in getting involved. (Ma, Uzbek)*

Many other participants (e.g., Akashi, Konishi, etc.) resonate with Ma's experience; they used the predominant affective terms for instance '担心' (worry), '不敢' (being afraid of), '尴尬' (embarrassment), indicating their concern about being unable to handle interactional situations effectively or being uncertain about what would occur in such interactional situations. They therefore chose not to take opportunities provided for IC. Such 'fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with people from different groups, especially cultural and/or ethnic groups' is defined as communication apprehension (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997, p. 148) , which leads to the withdrawal tendency in IC, and as indicated in this study, influence one's perceptions of identity.

Ma's case also demonstrates that a perceived lack of language proficiency exerts a

strong influence on confidence or WTC that has been correlated with the level of participation in IC. Such judgmental attitudes and feelings individuals hold about themselves and their accomplishments is derived from interaction with others, indicating their subjective evaluation of their worth, or 'self-esteem' (MacDonald & Leary, 2012). Previous studies suggest that self-perceived language proficiency links to communication apprehension that presumably affects self-esteem, is recognised as the strongest predictor of WTC (Clément et al., 2003). These accounts echo Neuliep (2012), who points that people who are high in IC apprehension tend to engender an unwillingness or even total avoidance of engaging in communication. Therefore, the perceived lack of language proficiency results in communication apprehension and a lack of engagement with IC, which brings difficulties in establishing social relationship with domestic students and involvement in the native community. It therefore influences learners' perceptions of identity.

However, those willing to participate in IC complained that the opportunities for IC were limited. Ruth, for instance, said,

*I don't really have many opportunities for talking with Chinese people. The only Chinese person I know is my language partner ... I feel excluded especially when I'm alone and others have friends. I think if I have opportunities to know more Chinese people, I can make friends and my Chinese will improve. And if my Chinese is good enough, it'll be easy for me to make friends and get involved.*  
(Ruth, Bennin)

Ruth puts forward correlations between access to Chinese, friendship formation, language development and a sense of belonging, and she ascribed her sense of

alienation to host nationals to her failure in developing social relationships resulting from her limited access to Chinese and lack of language proficiency. More importantly, as supported by Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2014) and Oetzel (2009), this study reveals that the opportunities for communication with target language users is believed to foster the formation of social networks, intercultural friendships in particular, and the development of language proficiency for IC, which has an influence on a sense of belonging and identity.

Tina specifically pointed out that the accommodation arrangements separated her from the locals, and she felt closed-off from Chinese people. According to Tina,

*我们的宿舍是分开的, 感觉把我们分成了两个 group。我觉得就是区别对待了。我觉得是 outsider。而且我没有办法认识中国朋友, 我很少说汉语, 所以我的汉语不提高。如果有很多中国人一起, 我的汉语会更好。(Tina, Colombia)*

*My dorm is separated from the Chinese students; I feel we are divided into two groups. I feel I'm an outsider. I don't have any opportunity to make Chinese friends. I rarely speak Chinese, which results in less development. My Chinese will be better if I stay with Chinese speakers. (Tina, Colombia)*

Tina's case demonstrates that accommodation arrangements can limit access to host students, which can lead to feelings of being an outsider identity. Moreover, such arrangements can limit access to a high level of language proficiency in Chinese and opportunities to establish social relationships, which will then influence their identity.

Similar to Tina, many participants expressed that they would have considerable time and opportunities to participate in IC if they lived with Chinese, which is perceived to

facilitate assimilation into the social or relational network of Chinese and a subjective feeling of belonging. As identity is attached to a sense of belonging (Ting-Toomey, 2005), living arrangements can have an impact on social integration and influence their sense of identity (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993). However, participants' expectation is inconsistent with previous research, which finds that living with natives as opposed to a dormitory placement with non-native speakers of the target language does not predict gains in language proficiency (Rivers, 1998). Moreover, Magnan and Back (2007) are also unable to establish any correlation between living arrangements and the development of target language proficiency. However, Meara (1994) found that, the amount of social time spent with native speakers to be a good predictor of improved language skills. Accommodation arrangements that separate domestic and international students may influence perceptions of identity as being divided; however, participants' perspective of living with domestic students who may contribute to language development, formation of intercultural friendships, or being as an insider, is yet to be empirically demonstrated. On the other hand, their expectation of developing language proficiency, establishing friendships and building an insider identity may benefit from the frequency of participation in IC, to which accommodation may form a significant part.

## **6.2 The change of identity**

As discussed, participants have a sense of being positioned as outsiders. However, they also experienced a change in identity from the stance of Chinese interlocutors;

they expressed a sense of belonging to a certain Chinese group and tended to position themselves as an insider.

Participants' experiences disclose a close relationship between language proficiency and identity, confirming that language acts as the most salient role in establishing social identities (Lippi-Green, 1997). Language barriers are noted as one of the defining factors in feeling as an outsider, whereas language proficiency is perceived to be important for acceptance and inclusion. Though the development of language proficiency appears to have no direct impact on participants' identities, it places direct influence on the establishment of social relationships, which ultimately influence identity construction. Individuals' ability to use language for IC is the pre-requisite for their expected projection of identity and the responses they receive from interlocutors (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2012).

Many participants spoke strongly about becoming a member of Chinese after spending a period of time in China. For example, Neil expressed his depression about difficulties in building friendships with Chinese (as discussed in section 6.1.2) that led to him being labelled as an outsider. However, he developed an affirmation of identity as Chinese with the development of language proficiency. This becomes particularly clear in his description of his relationships with the target community. As he said,

*Now I have many friends, they see me as Chinese — as one of them, and I see myself as Chinese too. You know, my Chinese is much better, so I don't have difficulty talking with Chinese people. When communication is no longer a problem, it's easy to make friends and get involved. And by talking with them, I*

*now know more about China, so it's easy to adapt to Chinese ways if you know them well. (Neil, Tanzanian)*

Mike, similarly, attributed being accepted by native speakers and even being given an identity as native-like because of Chinese language proficiency. Specifically, he pointed out being able to appropriately perform the dialectic feature of the target community that even some native speakers were unable to, which led him to being self-positioned and perceived as native. According to Mike,

*Chinese people call me 'Chinese boy' and they don't see me as a foreigner because we can communicate without any problem. I know how to speak Chinese appropriately with different people. 很多人都惊讶我会说东北话, 说的和东北人一样, 我觉得我是东北人。很多人来北方, 我觉得我比他们像 native speaker, 因为他们听不懂, 我可以。A large number of people felt so surprised that I can speak the dialect of the Northeast Area, the same as the local people — I even feel I am local. Many Chinese people come to the North part of China, I am more like a native speaker because I can understand, but they cannot.) (Mike, Ghana)*

The above cases demonstrate that language is a crucial aspect of individuals' sense of social identity. Neil and Mike both felt a stronger salience towards having a Chinese identity and a sense of being accepted, indicating an activation of Chinese culture identity in an IC situation. This refers to Chinese identity salience; with reference to social identity theory, when one's identity of being in a Chinese category becomes salient, it psychologically increases the influence of group membership on perception and behaviour (Oakes, 1987). This is ascribed to language development for IC and a good adaptation to the host culture. Moreover, according to identity negotiation theory, participants successfully evoke their desired identity (insider identity) during IC,

indicating ICC development (Ting-Toomey, 2005). In line with previous studies, this study reaffirms that target language proficiency is key to ICC (Chen & Starosta, 2012); it is also a strong predictor of successful adaptation in an intercultural context (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Intercultural adaptation refers to a process of reaching ICC and reflects the oscillating movements of identity change (Chen, 2013; Ting-Toomey, 1999). As such, the influence of language proficiency on individuals' identity change is observed in this study.

Wu reported that his identity change occurred from his self-conception of being from Afghanistan to 'half-Chinese', which is attributed to overcoming the language barrier and his growth in confidence in Chinese speaking, as he said,

*I feel because my language is better, I'm more confident talking to Chinese people and they're more willing to talk to me and make friends with me. I don't feel excluded. It's interesting that I sometimes talk with families and friends, I unconsciously say something in Chinese, sometimes I forget how to say in Pashto. I often say I'm half Chinese. (Wu, Afghanistan)*

Contrary to Ma (see section 6.1.3, p. 197) who demonstrated how the perceived lack of language proficiency negatively influenced WTC, participation in IC and sense of identity, Wu and many other participants' cases indicate that the perceived development of host language proficiency positively influenced their confidence and WTC with native Chinese, which directly influenced their sense of who they were and their ability to negotiate personal identities through the target language (Benson et al., 2012).

Moreover, Wu states that he encountered a point during his Chinese learning and IC, where he found himself at a loss for words in his first language from being in an immersion context. Such a disruption to the native language implies FL development and he perceived employing the host culture language during his trip to China as assimilating into the host culture, which ultimately led to a change of perceptions towards his identity. The perspective on identity in relation to language taken in Joseph (2004), is that language and identity are inseparable, and the use of language informs participants' desire to uncover the identities they are attempting to project. Language use in IC is an instrument that symbolises identity and making the presence of identity realised, in this sense, the use of language implies a shift across multiple identities presented in different groups (Wu, 2011). Therefore, taking on the host language and practicing it more frequently indicates being indexed one's identity as a host language identity (Chinese in this study) in IC, demonstrating that language use is central to the sense of self within an IC context (Clyne, 2003).

However, many argue that enhancing one's proficiency in a second/foreign language, may result in losing the first language and first language identity (Brown, 1980; Unganer, 2014). As Wu said, he tended to employ Chinese or even forget how to use his native language when interacting with other native speakers, which might be perceived as a sign of language loss. However, Liebkind (2010) holds that being able to use a second language in a more competent and frequent manner is more likely to be perceived as a situational shift of identity, and though it has an impact on one's

native language, it does not necessarily mean a loss of the original cultural and linguistic identity.

For international students in this study, the use of the host language society dominates in their social context resulting in losing practice of the native language, which impacts on their native language. Liebkind's (2010) supports that participants do not reject their first language or identity, but keep both alive instead. They become effective speakers of the host language to negotiate and display their desired identity, while retaining their native language.

In addition, participants' identity change also reflects in the act of adopting perspectives and values of Chinese culture. Participants reported that they identified with cultural differences, acquiring norms, values of host cultural groups, and changed their perspectives through their socialisation experience. According to INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005), these changes indicate changes of identity. For instance, Bai referred specifically to her perception change in regard to attitudes towards life of middle-aged group and eating habits as influenced by Chinese people based on a comparison with that of her country, recognising the importance of keeping a young mind-set and exercising regularly. Moreover, Austin exemplified his change occurring in perception towards 'individuality' and 'collectiveness', explaining that he found: *'Chinese people are more of collaborative, and it seems impossible in the US, where is more about individuality'*. Based on an understanding, he attributed 'collectiveness' to social development in the local community and changed his perceptions, pointing

out to that *'that's (collectiveness) what needs to be emphasised back home'*.

IC tends to be described as a process that involves the revision of concepts, beliefs, perspectives, attitudes, etc. that people have hitherto taken for granted, which leads to a change of identity (Berry et al., 1992). FL learners experience overwhelming positive intercultural development in terms of a better understanding of culture values and biases while abroad, which contributes to transforming perspectives, leading to participants' very identity being challenged. This study therefore demonstrates that challenges to one's perspective may constitute challenges to one's identity, which echoes Byram's (1997) perspective that individuals' identities that formed via socialisation are challenged through relativising the self and valuing others, which ultimately stimulates the development of new identities.

Beyond a change of perspectives, these cases (Bai, Austin) also reflect participants' ability to seek understandings within the host culture and develop openness towards cultural differences, indicating that ICC contributes to identity change. Many participants verify this finding and they are optimistic about the changes, perceiving such as benefits to intercultural integration and adaptation.

*I would say I know more and I understand more — before I would guess a lot. Because I'm able to communicate with people, I feel I have changed my perspective on China, and I have changed myself to adapt in the sense of me realising that I'm the same. (Natasha, Denmark)*

*Being influenced by Chinese culture and people's thinking, I think has changed me. But I think this change is necessary because I need to accept and adapt to the new*

*culture, otherwise, I would not be able to successfully communicate or be involves in Chinese. (Bai, India).*

Aside from the change of perceptions and skills discussed above, participants also pointed out their changes on personality traits. They are aware that they became more open towards cultural differences and to change, which is a major factor in reducing difficulties with the foreignness of a different culture and further, to develop in ICC as discussed in section 5.2.1. As Kim (2001) argues, individuals with an open-mind may develop ‘a new, alternative identity that is broader, more inclusive, more intercultural’ (pp. 232-233). In this sense, being more open is a predictor of identity change. As stated,

*I get more open-minded and I broaden my mind because I see a lot that I can't see in my country. If I didn't come to China, didn't meet with Chinese, I would definitely be not as open as I am. I think I have been a different person; definitely, I wouldn't be this outgoing. (Alice, US)*

*I experienced a different culture and see some better aspects. I think I'm more open to the differences and accept them. I needed to learn these, and I did — I changed myself. (Aisha, Kazakhstan)*

As illustrated above, participants’ identities experienced some changes. Many participants were inclined to describe their self-defined identity as ‘someone in-between’ in viewing changes that enabled them to integrate into the practices of two cultures. According to Casper,

*I think I am somebody in-between, multi-influential or something, maybe. I think the way I perceive myself is as a Dutch person, I think in a Dutch way, I lived a Dutch way, but along the way I go to China and I perceive a lot of things, I see*

*things I like and I see things I don't like. By learning that, my Dutch identity is influenced, so I think for the most part, for the biggest part, I'm Dutch, but I am also influenced by other cultures, other ways of thinking. (Casper, Netherlands)*

Similarly, Wu, as discussed above (see p. 203), describes himself as 'half Chinese'. As indicated in Casper and Wu's cases, they labelled themselves as 'somebody in-between' or 'half-Chinese', implying that they belong both to Chinese and to their native entity. Being situated in a peculiar space of in-betweenness is often presented as the "middle" state, 'swinging between' distinctive cultural practices and engendering a 'both/and' type of hybridity constituted by elements of these cultures' (Zhou & Pilcher, 2019, p. 24).

In Wu's case, the hybridity and in-betweenness are emerged between the first space (Chinese culture and language) and the second space (Afghan culture and language). While for Casper, his sense of identity was complicated by his intercultural experience between the Netherlands and other countries. Hybridity is precisely about the fact that 'when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them' (Bhabha, 1990, p. 216), implying an individual's identity is not fixed or impure. The new structures and alliances between international students and domestics, as indicated in these cases, suggests that their hybrid stance is characterised as acceptance and being included.

However, other participants found that their in-between status is categorised as 'neither/nor': *'I am a foreigner in China, but when I come back to my country, I also feel different, I am foreigner'* (Akashi, Pakistan). This case indicates that the

hybridity/in-between status leads to an ‘other’ position (neither Chinese nor Pakistani) as they may exhibit aspects that are similar to those already known, but also those strikingly foreign from existing understanding (Zhou & Pilcher, 2019). Akashi’s case demonstrates that locating in the in-between space, people may not be accepted by both communities, which leads to a sense of double exclusion. Whether as a ‘both/and’ or a ‘neither/nor’ state, the in-between space ‘set everything afloat in a process of constant shape-shifting and becoming’ (Moslund, 2010, p. 111), which evokes a change in perceived identity.

Participants’ perceptions were in line with the non-essentialised view of identity, which is derived from non-essentialist culture, highlighting that identity is not stable in essence, but a process of change (Holliday et al., 2010). In this study, it is evident that when defining identity, participants narrowly link their identity to national identity. This study demonstrates that IC occurs in a culturally and socially determined communicative ‘in-between’ space, where cultural identity is interactively negotiated and developed (Bhabha, 1994).

Moreover, being influenced by both cultures of Ghana and China, Yixiu mentioned that his multiple identities create a liminal and in-between space that enables other perspectives to emerge and equip him with the capacity to function in more than one culture, which allows him to understand perspectives from others and enables him to interpret and evaluate intercultural encounters more accurately (Bhabha, 1990; Soja, 1996). As Yixiu said,

*My identity has changed. We all have so many identities, we have so many faces, we choose the situation and we present an identity, which identity fits perfectly — you come up with that. (Yixiu, Ghana)*

Yixiu's accounts echoes Soja (1996), who argues that the third space, going beyond conventional borders and the status quo, can hold creative combinations and provide alternative ways of thinking. New identities are generated through negotiation within the 'third space' or 'in-between' position, individuals add some part of foreign culture and subtract some part of their native culture to generate a new identity. These multiple identities emerge from communicating with perceived cultural others. IC is perceived as a third space for meanings to be produced, consumed and changed between people who are not mere representatives of their own culture, but also act as cultural hybrids, which is an assumed outcome of IC.

However, the gains and changes of perception from study abroad, and the change of identity, are shown to influence participants' re-adaptation to their home culture, which is discussed in the next section.

### **6.3 Re-entry: experiencing the impact of identity change**

In accordance to the findings above, intercultural experiences led to participants realising that their identities have changed in some way over a length of stay from a few weeks to a few years in China, which they feel positive about. As Alyssa (US) said '*I think it is a great thing, that's the point of living in different places, experiencing different cultures*'. However, participants' newly acquired identity,

values and behaviours may not fit with their once-familiar home culture, leading to some difficulties and challenges of re-adjusting and re-adapting to their home culture. It is often unanticipated but not uncommon for international students, especially for those who have been immersed in another culture for a significant period of time. Challenges faced by participants resulting from identity change are discussed as below.

One of the challenges participants mentioned was their reconnection with old friends. David, for instance, recounted his experience of suffering alienation from friends and being identified as 'Chinese' on re-entry, which gave rise to a sense of loss. With the expectation that their friendship would remain unchanged, he found his friends changed their social group, which brought difficulties for him to fit back in. According to David,

*I think my friends are still my friends and friendship won't change. But when I came back home and met with my friends, we've known each other for more than 10 years. They brought their new friends and introduced me to their friends, like 'He is Chinese'. It shocked me, really. (David, Slovenia)*

Sojourners often expected to return to an unchanged home as unchanged individuals, which might negatively influence their re-entry process. Returning sojourners can be disappointed because they fail to realise that their friends find new friendships and activities (Wang, 1997). Similarly, Yixiu came to realise that the experience abroad increased the distance between him and his friends. He felt that this led to disconnection from friends, and a sense of feeling a foreigner in his home country. He

said,

*When you go back it's difficult to fit in, in many different ways, from the way you eat, the way you talk, the way you do everything, it changes. It's not easy to fit in, to settle in well. In my country, people are like, '他是出国回来的, 别理他', 让我觉得我在哪里都是外国人的感觉。(He came from abroad, don't talk to him', that makes me feel I am a foreigner anywhere) (Yixiu, Ghana)*

Both David and Yixiu experienced some interpersonal difficulties from being perceived as a foreigner after re-entry from China, as their friendships drifted apart and made them feel excluded. These cases demonstrate that returnees expect to return to an unchanged home with friends unchanged and welcoming; however, it is not the case. The disconfirmed expectations regarding personal relationships could be extremely upsetting and difficult to solve (Gaw, 2000; Wang, 1997). Returnees are compared to characters in a film who arrive into the story halfway to play an active role without being familiar with other characters or the audience (Butcher, 2002).

Moreover, David confirms his feeling of being left out from his friends' behaviours, as he said,

*... maybe it's a joke, but I think they see me different, I can feel it. You know nobody cares about my life in China. They talk about people and things that I don't know; it's so difficult for me to fit in. I feel alienated. (David, Slovenia)*

David described his feeling of friendship as '*I am not their friend*', indicating his change on perception of his own identity. In fact, David's sense of isolation and grief for the loss of his friends is shared by many study abroad returnees. In line with Cusher and Brisline (1997), friends' indifference in their experiences abroad generates

feelings of disappointment and frustration in returning students. To take one step further, this may partly be because the friends at home cannot meaningfully identify with their experience (Allison, Davis-Berman, & Berman, 2011), but in some cases, friends are even found to be hostile due to jealousy or feeling threatened (Storti, 2001).

Therefore, friendship renegotiation and going through the emotional loss of friendships is a problem for returning students. This experience indicates that identity is perceived by their friends to have changed, which might bring difficulty for them to match their new identity ascribed by their friends, and lead to a new and unexpected identity. This study demonstrates how participants' identities are perceived by people in the home country, which might be changed during their time abroad, and therefore challenge the re-entry process.

Moreover, returning home is also challenging in terms of psychological adjustment, Marus, Kai and Aisha expressed feeling 'difficult' on re-entry from abroad, which is one of the most common descriptions about the re-entry experience (Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010). Participants experienced challenges in their social life adjustment after returning home. Influenced by a foreign culture, they brought back a new identity, new values, and new insights, and developed a critical attitude towards the home culture and people. As Kai said,

*在一个国家生活久了，肯定有改变，回到自己国家就会发现有些地方不太适应。我已经很适应中国了，回到美国，我就觉得有些方面没有那么好。而且*

因为我一直在中国生活，我失去了很多朋友，因为联系的越来越少，其实这挺遗憾的。(Kai, US)

*Living in a country for a long time, you experience changes and notice some aspects that are difficult to adapt to when home. I have already adapted to China, so I felt it's not that good in America in certain aspects. Moreover, because I've been living in China, there's less and less contact between us. It's a pity that I lost many friends. (Kai, US)*

Specifically, Kai described her re-entry experience in regard to different social conventions. She exemplified the aspects that she felt uncomfortable about after re-entry; for instance, in terms of eating habits, she said, ‘在美国大家一个人在吃, 太无聊了。没有在中国的感觉, 中国很热闹’ (*In the US, people dine alone, which is so boring. It feels different in China where the dining atmosphere is very lively*), and in terms of social relationships, she said ‘关系 (*interpersonal relationships*) are incredible, 有人情味在 (*full of human kindness*)’, and in terms of the perceptions of social rules, she said ‘*Everything is well organised in the US and people will follow the rules strictly. But in China, you can see the variability; I came to enjoy this quite a bit*’. The change in perception reflected the change of identity, which challenged her re-entry process.

Likewise, Alyssa stated her personal experience on her change of perceptions and values. She was so impressed by how Chinese people do favours for others and maintain relationships. She experienced and deeply understood the meaning of ‘关系’<sup>26</sup> in Chinese culture and wishes to bring it home — but she may experience

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<sup>26</sup> 关系(guānxi): interpersonal relationships or connections, , including kinship, friendship, business,

problems integrating new cultural values. Alyssa said,

*... I would expect them not to know how, they wouldn't know because they've never been anywhere, they never experience other cultures. (Alyssa, US)*

It is evident in this study that re-entry is a grieving process. International students grieve the loss of friendships, difficulties in adaptation and a renegotiation of relationships due to the changes in their identity, perceptions, behaviours, as being influenced by their intercultural experience aboard. Given participants expressed difficulties in returning to their countries of origin after re-entry, I would argue that re-entry preparation is crucial, though it is often neglected within the academic community (Jackson, 2010).

#### **6.4 Chapter summary**

This chapter focuses on participants' perceptions of identity in regard to three aspects, including: identity as an outsider, the change of identity and the influence of identity change.

Participants state that their physical appearance is a visible feature and characteristic of being an outsider that hinders IC. However, they realise that being different is not always an obstacle to IC; it can arise host people's curiosity and facilitate IC. Another factor is the lack of language proficiency, which sets up barriers for IC and the establishment of social relationships. As a result, participants are identified and positioned as outsiders. In addition, participation in IC is demonstrated to be related to

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etc.

participants' self-position. The low self-esteem in IC and the lack of opportunities for IC are both causes of a lower frequency of participation in IC, which ultimately influences how participants' perceive their identities and their ICC development.

However, participants' identities change over time through IC and as a result of IC. The frequency of target language use and loss of the first language are identified to impact on perceived identity. However, I prefer to understand it as a situational shift of identity that reflects language use instead of losing one's native language and identity. Moreover, this study uncovers that the change of perceptions, values and personality traits all indicate a change of identity. Given the change of identity, participants gradually immerse in the host community and are indexed as insiders. The change of identity from an 'outsider' to an 'insider' indicates participants' abilities to negotiate a desired identity, which is associated with the development of ICC. In becoming an 'insider' of a Chinese community, participants described their identities as 'in-between' — a hybrid identity influenced by both the native and host culture, which provides alternative ways of thinking and creating perspectives for viewing the world.

Furthermore, participants noticed that they have changed their values, perceptions and identity during their experience abroad with the development of ICC and are optimistic about these changes. However, their identity ties, behaviours and perceptions are identified as challenge to their re-entry process. They experienced challenges in regard to their reconnection with friends and psychological adjustment

as being influenced by their host culture and the strengthening of their new identities.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter synthesises the research aims, research questions and main research findings and concludes with the following sections. It first summarises the main research findings in relation to the research questions of this study. Then, it outlines the contributions to knowledge and practical implications. It also discusses the limitations of the study and offers recommendations for future research.

### **7.2 Summary of main research findings**

This study employed a phenomenological approach to explore IC experience and the assigned meanings of CFL learners involved in IC with native speakers of China. It enabled me to go beyond their experience in search of hidden meanings and participants' detailed perceptions of ICC and their changing sense of identity. The preceding findings sections presented participants' personal IC experience and highlighted the uniqueness of their constructions and understandings of ICC and identity.

Three research questions were formulated in response to the literature review and research focus, and key findings of the current study are summarised in Figure 6. This figure mirrors participants' journey of CFL learning and intercultural communication during their period education abroad in China. It is also a trajectory of development

and transformation. With a desire towards integration and enhancing their career prospects, participants began their journey of studying CFL and engaging in IC. During the initial stage of CFL learning abroad, participants experienced intercultural communication challenges; the major challenges and causes of communication problems are identified. Later, they became able to deal with difficulties in intercultural situations and gained enhanced understandings of their perceived requirements of successful IC, indicating their perceptions of ICC. Concurrently, this process also reflects participants' perceptions of identity, transformed from the sense of being excluded (outsider) to being included (insider). This transformation occurs in a third space where participants embraced being in-between and mediated between cultures and groups. This process can be challenging for students when returning home after a study abroad experience. The following part outlines the main research findings in detail.

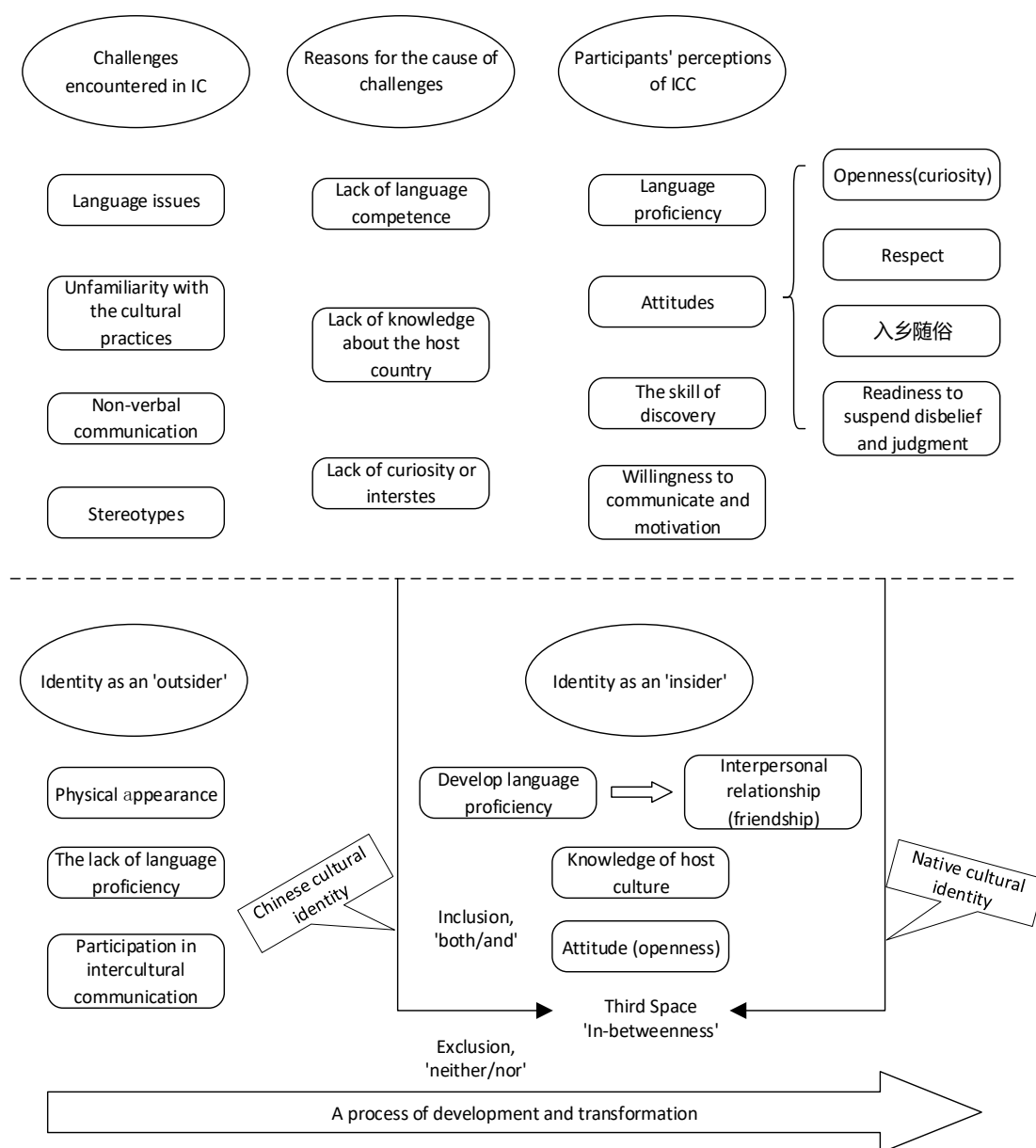


Figure 6. Main findings of this study

*RQ1: How do learners of Chinese as a foreign language experience intercultural communication in China?*

It was found that motivation for CFL learning also encouraged participants to engage in IC (see Chapter 4). CFL learning was not an accidental choice for participants; indeed, it related to their consideration of career prospects and a strong willingness to engage in the host community underpinned by a desire for integration. The study

demonstrates that motivation is not fixed, but a process of change, which in turn influences participants' IC.

Throughout participants' IC experience, they all encountered some difficulties; their IC was mainly challenged by: (1) language issues; (2) unfamiliarity with the cultural practices; (3) nonverbal communication; and, (4) stereotypes. As pointed out in the discussion of findings, these four main challenges resonate with those identified in the existing literature on IC.

This study suggests that language issues are the greatest cause of difficulties in IC. Participants pointed out many linguistic aspects as sources of misunderstanding, for instance, pronunciations, tones, the colloquial use of words, the polysemy of a word, among other area. IC is characterised by multilingual practices, which takes place through language use as per all human communication. This finding therefore demonstrates the vital role of language proficiency, which was not specifically addressed in Byram's (1997) ICC model.

Unfamiliarity with cultural practices of a host community is another frequently mentioned challenge. Being influenced by different cultural values and habitual social norms, people within different cultural groups may behave differently, as identified in this study as reflecting in the way in which we greet, address and respond to compliments. This corresponds with previous studies (e.g., Chen, 2010; Yin, 2009), highlighting that different usages of words are shaped by one's cultural values and beliefs. Due to the differences regarding language behaviours in interaction may lead

to difficulties in IC, and this study, in line with Byram's (1997) ICC model, demonstrates the importance of obtaining knowledge of interlocutor's culture, which contributes to understanding language expressions and IC.

As to the third aspect, participants pointed out that the misinterpretation of nonverbal behaviours is a source of intercultural misunderstandings further challenging the IC experience. In this study, touching and personal space relating to the concept of 'haptics' and 'proxemics' presented as participants' main concerns in nonverbal communication. Given different cultural connotations attached to nonverbal behaviours, to take one step further, nonverbal misinterpretation results from a lack of understanding regarding the host culture. Nonverbal behaviours are a principal marker of social distinction and involved in the process of social interaction, therefore this knowledge is crucial for IC, which is emphasised in Byram's (1997) ICC model.

When it comes to the forth aspect, participants realised that their stereotypical perceptions towards China and Chinese people is a stumbling block in IC. Similar findings have already be identified in the existing literature (Barna, 1997; Gudykunst, 2004; Jackson, 2014). Participants found that mass media and social communication are two ways of forming stereotypes associated with the accuracy and richness of information input. Though stereotypes serve to reduce uncertainty in IC, they also form a source of inaccurate information or only reveal a part of the whole culture or tend to be over-generalised. It is these characteristics of stereotypes that hinder IC (Houghton, 2014; Jandt, 2010).

*RQ2: How do learners of Chinese as a foreign language perceive intercultural communicative competence?*

Data in Chapter 5 represents participants' perceptions of ICC based on their IC experience in China and understanding that constitute: (1) willingness to communicate and motivation; (2) attitudes towards intercultural communication; (3) language proficiency; and, (4) the skill of discovery.

In terms of the first aspect, findings are synthesised in Figure 5 (see section 5.1), demonstrating the relationship between motivation, willingness to communicate and perceived language proficiency in particular. Motivation is a determining factor influencing WTC, influenced by perceived language proficiency. The figure shows that the frequency of IC, anxiety and confidence directly or indirectly influence WTC and motivation. WTC in the target language, as driven by motivation, involves a readiness to initiate an IC process, and this willingness forms the basis of competent IC (Lustig & Koester, 2009). This study thus affirms that WTC and motivation are important contributors to ICC.

Regarding attitudes towards IC, essential attitudes that emerged in this study are openness, respect, readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment, and '入乡随俗' (see section 5.2). A strong emphasis has been placed on openness that is embedded in Byram's model, encouraging being open to cultural differences, changing stereotypes and moving out of comfort zones. Participants highlighted that a lack of openness leads to ethnocentrism, which impedes IC. Moreover, they pointed out that accepting

and following the rules and behaviours of the host culture, and being able to speak the host language, are crucial and display respect. In addition, due to the inconsistency between participants' stereotypes and their experiences of social reality, they highlighted a critical awareness of stereotypes and a willingness to question and discard preconceived notions. This related to a key attitudinal element — readiness to suspend disbelief and judgments, which is emphasised in Byram's ICC model. Another commonly mentioned factor is '入乡随俗', emphasising *doing as Chinese do when in China*. If extended to the wider context of IC, this means following the host's example when in a foreign country. It is understood as a combination of different attitudinal factors; moreover, it is also a process of adaptation.

The third component of perceived ICC is language proficiency, which contributes to overcoming language barriers as discussed in Chapter 4. Two main ways for developing language proficiency are identified: inside and outside the classroom. Formal language teaching inside the classroom is expected to provide the basis for daily communication, which to a certain degree satisfies participants' expectations of language development. However, participants complained that class size and teaching methodology were not as expected. As for language development outside classrooms, participants strongly emphasise social interaction with NSs as the most useful way for practicing and developing language proficiency. Though it contributes to the development of receptive skills and productive skills, communication with NNSs are found to contribute more in the literature (Shehadeh, 1999; Varonis & Gass, 1985).

Therefore, this study suggests that learners value opportunities for IC with NNSs using Chinese, and are not limited to NSs.

The final aspect participants particularly highlighted was the skill of discovery, which is embedded in Byram's (1997) ICC model. They found that if accompanied by this skill, intercultural misunderstandings could be used as a source of learning. With this skill, participants look beyond the negative side of misunderstandings and instead recognise the potential of enhancing their awareness of the host culture and as a starting point to obtain and exchange information between cultures. Given that misunderstanding is prevalent and inevitable in IC, this finding hopes to encourage intercultural speakers to be positive about intercultural misunderstandings, and more importantly, to develop the skill of discovery.

*RQ 3: How do learners of Chinese as a foreign language perceive their identity?*

Participants' perceptions of their identity are described in some detail in Chapter 6. According to the data, IC and the process of developing ICC reflect their trajectory of transforming or developing identity. The participants generally experienced three phases, including: (1) identity as an outsider; (2) the change of identity; and, (3) re-entry: experiencing the impact of identity change.

Participants found that their different and distinct physical appearance, the lack of language proficiency, and lack of opportunities for interaction with native Chinese, are reasons for categorising themselves or being categorised as an 'outsider'. Physical

appearance is a strong and permanent marker and visual observations of the physical appearance are often utilised as a criteria that determines individuals' identities and influence IC, which is in line with Neuliep (2009). Moreover, participants found that their perceived lack of language proficiency influenced friendship formation and led to their own hesitation in IC, which ultimately influenced their perceptions of identity. Meanwhile, they also pointed out that there is a lack of opportunities to prepare for IC, which passively impacts on their engagement. Participants' self-positioning is as an 'outsider', according to social identity theory.

However, IC involves a process of identity reconstruction and transformation; participants experienced a shift to some extent, from being identified as an outsider to an insider in the host country. As influenced by the host community, participants expressed a change of attitudes, behaviours, values, and so forth. They therefore tend to position themselves as 'someone in-between', indicating their hybrid identity that is negotiated within a third space (IC in this study) (Bhabha, 1990, 1994). One key influence on identity (re)construction is the development of language proficiency, which relates to the establishment of relationships. Considering the multifaceted identities of an individual and the presence of identity is associated with the salience of identity in a particular context, therefore their abilities to evoke their desired identity and to be accepted by others through IC are significant, which is a notion perceived as ICC.

Since participants' identities are reconstructed, which implies changes to individuals;

they experience challenges when re-adjusting to their native culture. They found that the disconnection from previous friends and the difficulties readjusting to their previous life style could lead to a sense of alienation and further influence their perception of identity.

### **7.3 Contributions to the field of intercultural communicative competence**

This phenomenological study creates a space for participants to voice their IC experience and perceptions regarding IC with native Chinese speakers and also offers new insights on how participants make sense of IC, understand ICC and view themselves. Given that Byram's ICC model provides a specific lens through which to holistically make sense of participants' IC experience, it is therefore employed as a theoretical framework and analytical model to interpret participants' IC experience and perceptions. Based on the data presented in Chapter 4, 5 and 6 that focuses on elucidating participants' IC experience, understanding of ICC and perceptions of identity, the findings of this empirical study make several contributions through complementing and extending existing evidence and perspectives, which are discussed below.

First, in regard to the study context, the majority of relevant studies on ICC have been conducted in Western cultural contexts and focused on EFL learners' experience. This fails to adequately capture the experiences of IC and the ways in which IC experience informs understandings of ICC in other cultural contexts. Accordingly, the existing literature calls for more non-Western perspectives of ICC to achieve a more

comprehensive understanding. This study contributes in filling this knowledge gap and illuminates an alternative perspective to existing conceptions of ICC, which takes into account the lived IC experiences from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, both in terms of participants and settings, rather than remaining limited to EFL learners in a Western setting. This study brings forth the IC experience of international students who study CFL in a Chinese higher educational setting and their perspectives of ICC, which previous studies have overlooked, preferring to focus on EFL learners' IC experience in English-speaking countries and EFL education. The Chinese language has become an increasingly important and influential language, which has led to a rapid growth in the number of people learning CFL in Chinese higher educational institutions; IC between CFL learners and native Chinese people has thus become more frequent. Thus, research into this field in this study is timely and relevant. The inclusion of a wide variety of cultural voices to ascertain what constitutes ICC contributes to the body of knowledge about ICC, and helps us to rethink and enrich the current conception of ICC by introducing such perspectives.

Second, this study introduces a different perspective on thinking through ICC, i.e. the perspective of CFL learners. The conceptualisation of ICC in this study is based on what participants experience in IC and their sense-making. As indicated in Chapter 4, participants reflect on the challenges they encountered in IC, based on which, several important aspects that influence IC are derived from lived IC experience, especially when their competence or abilities to achieve successful IC is not available. These

challenges contribute to an understanding of ICC to some extent. For instance, participants identified language issues as constraining elements in IC, and based on this, they came to realise that developing language proficiency is crucial for IC. Moreover, they find that stereotypes are a stumbling block in IC, suggesting a critical need for being willing to approach the unfamiliar and suspend disbelief and stereotypes in order to achieve successful IC.

This study shows that participants' understanding of their IC experience and perceptions inform four core themes that constitute ICC. These include a willingness to communicate and motivation, attitudes, language proficiency, and the skill of discovery that are crucial for achieving appropriate and effective behaviours in IC, which can also be used as a requirement for producing successful IC and criteria for assessing ICC. The following figure (Figure 7) shows a comparison between participants' perceptions of ICC and Byram's ICC model, which make the differences more visual. It is worth noting that the 5 *savoirs* are frequently used to refer to Byram's ICC model because they are perceived to be the main objectives of FLTL. This study therefore compares participants' perceptions of ICC with the 5 *savoirs* to discuss different perspectives.

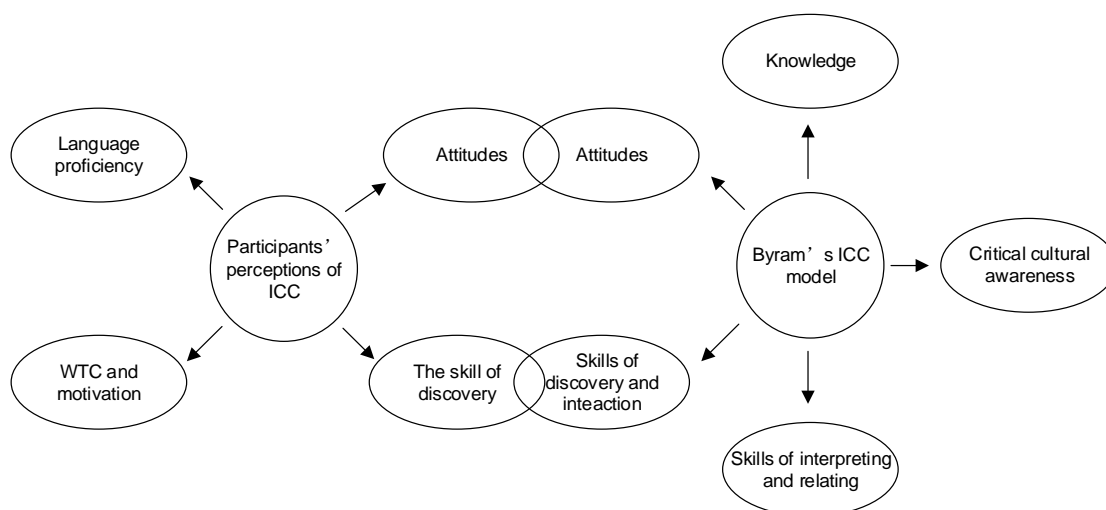


Figure 7. Comparison between participants' perceptions of ICC and Byram's ICC model

As shown, it is clear that there are overlaps between Byram's ICC model and participants' perceived ICC; as Deardorff (2009) states, there are certain elements that may be similar between different perspectives in viewing ICC, though there are also distinctions between perspectives. Among the four major elements of ICC as identified by participants, Byram's ICC model comprises constructs of attitudes and the skill of discovery. The attitudinal factors of openness and readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment are clearly explained in Byram's model.

Despite similarities on the core components that constitute ICC, this study enriches Byram's model by showing how a willingness to communicate, motivation and related issues influence the process of IC, which offers further insights into ICC. In addition to the attitudinal factors of openness and readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment, as expounded in Byram's ICC model, another frequently quoted disposition is '入乡随俗' and respect, which emerged in this study. These offer an extension to

Byram's model, demonstrating the importance of the willingness to respect, accept and follow behaviours or rules of the target culture in IC.

Moreover, findings illuminate the visibility and vitality of perceived language proficiency as an important component of ICC. Even though it has been emphasised in Byram's (1997) ICC model, it received relatively less attention because the model heavily focuses on intercultural competence — the five '*savoirs*'. This finding is in line with Risager's (2007) critiques of Byram's ICC model for not explicitly discussing the language-culture nexus as discussed in section 2.2.2.4. Moreover, Byram (2012b) himself recognised that an explicit reference to language and language proficiency is missing in his theorising of ICC, and the relationships between linguistic competence and cultural competence are not clarified.

The findings in regard to language proficiency highlight participants' difficulties in understanding others, being understood and establishing intercultural relationships, which have an impact on their perceptions of identity. Given that the need for language proficiency within IC situations was keenly felt as participants encountered challenges, the findings contribute to more in-depth thinking about ICC to meet the realities and needs of CFL learners. Language is a means, not only for understanding the host culture, but also in transcending their own cultural worldviews and relating effectively with others, which leads participants to express an interest to learn CFL. It is noteworthy that a close relationship has been identified between language proficiency and the establishment of social relationships. This is a two-way

relationship, i.e. language proficiency develops as participants establish close interpersonal relationships with host nationals, while the intercultural relationship benefits language development. Accordingly, this study further contributes to an understanding of ICC development as a process that includes developing language proficiency, which can be attained through relationship building. However, other aspects regarding intercultural competence in Byram's model, including critical cultural awareness, skills of interpreting and relating, and skill of interaction were not explicitly nor commonly recognised or highlighted by the participants.

It is worth mentioning that the participants implicitly recognised the significance of knowledge of both the target and their own culture, which form an important part of Byram's ICC model. Participants realised that the unfamiliarity with cultural practices and the potential misinterpretation of nonverbal signals is a cause of intercultural misunderstanding. However, they highlighted the skill of discovering cultural practices, which enabled them to familiarise themselves with the host culture. Therefore, it can be said that knowledge plays a crucial role in IC, which can be indirectly involved in their conceptualisation of ICC.

Third, different from the focus of Byram's ICC model that is concerned with the personal and social development of the FL learner as a single individual in a formal FLT setting, the present study focuses on CFL learners' everyday world social interactions and views ICC in relation to all people engaged in IC and the relationships between them. To be specific, this study views ICC from the aspect of

identity, such as social identity and the sense of cultural belonging, which remains under-researched. Accordingly, it offers an in-depth understanding of ICC in light of participants' transformation of identity, how they construct and re-construct themselves. This standpoint draws attention to the critical importance of ICC to identity transformation.

With regard to identity, many factors, such as worldview, social behaviours, language proficiency, among others, do not only influence IC, but also identity. More importantly, this study highlights that the establishment of interpersonal relationships with members of the host community is facilitated through the ability to communicate interculturally, which contributes to a robust understanding of ICC and is associated with identity. From the participants' perspective, the development of ICC is, to some extent, influenced by whether or not they have Chinese friends, which makes a difference to their perceptions of being an insider or outsider. In this way, creating desired interpersonal relationships influences participants' IC and their perceptions of identity, which offers a new perspective of ICC by focusing on positioning, social relationships in social interactions that involves two parties, instead of the abilities needed for personal and cultural development of individuals.

Participants understand this concept and express their identity to others through IC, i.e. their identity is influenced by their interlocutors and transformed through IC. Given that IC generates a 'third space' between languages, people and cultures, which is a space of in-betweenness and liminality enabling a third perspective to grow and a

hybrid identity to form. This contradicts the essentialist view of identity that defines culture and identity as fixed, highlighting that a hybrid identity is communicated and (re)constructed across different cultures during IC. As discussed in section 6.2, located in a hybrid/in-between position, between Chinese cultural identity and their own in IC, participants negotiated their identities and being positioned in a ‘both/and’ stance where they felt comfortable, indicating their being accepted and involved in the target community. However, for some participants, this third space/hybrid in-betweenness is ‘a contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37) to which they may not be able to join. Participants expressed their sense of being a person who is in a ‘neither/nor’ position, indicating exclusion from both communities, or as an ‘outsider’. In this sense, the ‘third space’ generated in IC may be comfortable or uncomfortable for intercultural speakers; identity can be that of an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’, which is largely determined by their abilities to negotiate their desired identity, in accordance with Ting-Toomey’s (1999) Identity Negotiation Theory, which is referred to as ICC.

Fourth, in regard to the context of developing ICC, this study focuses on wider everyday situations to provide evidence on how ICC development is influenced by social interactions instead of focusing on formal FL teaching inside classroom. This study therefore shows that IC experience is not limited to being a source for conceptions of ICC, but also a part of a process of becoming interculturally competent. Social interaction with native Chinese speakers has been shown to provide an

appropriate context for developing ICC and engaging in appropriate behaviours in IC, demonstrating that IC experience and ICC development are interwoven. As indicated in this study, participants view IC as the best way to learn Chinese as it is learned in authentic language environments, contributing to the learning of pronunciation, tones, the native use of language in given context, and so forth. Moreover, they realise that the misunderstandings and difficulties encountered in IC are sources of developing ICC. In this sense, IC is no longer the single objective of FL learning and developing ICC, it is also a means for them to develop. This study therefore not only extends understandings of what transpires in IC, but also how to acquire ICC over the course of IC.

Fifth, this study illustrates the complexity and dynamics of the IC experience in the context of education abroad from the perspectives of international students in China. It specifically elucidates individual differences in the ways in which people respond to cultural differences and make sense of their IC experience. Moreover, findings highlight that participants' development of ICC were shaped or influenced by a variety of motivational, attitudinal and linguistic factors and skills, which ultimately influenced their perceptions of their own identity.

#### **7.4 Implications of the study**

In many ways, this study has confirmed the existing literature, yet in different contexts. As discussed in section 2.1.5, limited study has been conducted with a specific focus on CFL learners' IC experience in the context of study abroad in China,

this study was conducted to fill in the gap. The findings of this study raise a variety of implications for prospective international students, Chinese universities and CFL teachers in higher educational institutions in general. The implications are elaborated respectively as follows.

#### **7.4.1 Implications for prospective international students**

As suggested by presented empirical findings, international students in China may encounter various challenges during IC (see Chapter 4). This study, aiming at understanding the underlying reasons for the challenges in IC, offers implications for sojourners to develop specific competences and/or skills in dealing with potential challenges in IC, for instance, to consciously develop a sensitivity and awareness of sociocultural diversity, a willingness to learn about other cultures and develop language proficiency for achieving appropriate and effective IC, all of which suggested to benefit prospective international students (Byram, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 2000, 2012).

Moreover, as indicated by participants' IC experience, this study values direct IC with host nationals, which contributes to a deeper understanding of both host and native cultures, the development of language proficiency, and the establishment of intercultural friendships. In this sense, this study suggests that students enhance their awareness of the importance of IC with host cultures and to make every effort to maintain broad interactions with the host community and make the most of their social networks with host nationals, instead of focusing co-nationals or other

international students, which contributes in developing ICC, facilitating cultural understandings, enjoying a holistic intercultural experience, and enhancing the satisfactory studying abroad. Moreover, as Deardorff (2009) argues, there is no pinnacle for ICC — the development of ICC is a lifelong process. In this sense, it is suggested that the process of becoming interculturally competent requires a great amount of on-going learning from one's intercultural experiences and expanding of IC skills. Therefore, the implication for prospective international students is to increase their IC in terms of quantity and quality, which contributes to ICC development accordingly.

Furthermore, the current study uncovers what is required to become interculturally competent from the experiences of the participants, offering a conceptualisation of ICC, which is valuable for prospective international students. By exploring participants' lived IC experience, this study identifies some key aspects of ICC that need to be developed. Motivation, the willingness to communicate and attitudes set a starting point that leads to the acquisition of knowledge and skills for achieving successful IC or personal goals. Moreover, language proficiency is a crucial element of ICC, through which international students achieve effective communication, form intercultural relationships and negotiate identity. Besides, a lack of understanding of a target culture sets up barriers for IC, in this case, participants value the skill of obtaining knowledge of the host culture. In acknowledging the dimensions that influence IC, prospective international students can enhance their awareness, be

prepared and use it as a framework to further guide their efforts in developing ICC.

#### **7.4.2 Implications for Chinese higher educational institutions and staff**

Studying abroad creates a new environment that supports students in fully engaging with the host environment, and universities have a responsibility to foster effective IC; for instance, by conducting relevant intercultural education programmes (Council of Europe, 2008), which contribute in enhancing intercultural awareness, developing ICC and eventually gaining a sense of well-being. This study advocates that the intercultural study abroad environment is crucial in facilitating the development of international students' desired identities and sense of belonging. In light of the rich data about identity reconstruction and transformation, I suggest improvements to intercultural education in Chinese universities. At the institutional level, educators and staff need to place effort in helping international students negotiate a positive identity and gain more positive sojourner experiences while abroad. Considering participants' expectations of involving Chinese students and developing interpersonal relationships, this study offers suggestions in terms of creating opportunities for IC, which may maintain more connections and enhance intercultural friendships with host nationals and other international students.

An implication addressing the environment in China derives from the accommodation allocated by the university; for example, participants lived separately to host national students but were willing to live together, which led to a sense of isolation and self-positioning as an outsider, as reported in section 6.1.3. Institutional staff may

benefit from reading accounts such as the ones included in this study to become aware of the implications of separate accommodation. Accordingly, institutions could be mindful when trying to categorise students because this may influence their perceptions of identity and intercultural experience. Therefore, how to sensitively structure the group membership becomes a strategic task for institutions and they should consider international students' cultural background, personal attributes, and needs to create a desirable environment for all. In addition, another struggle international students widely identified is that they did not have enough opportunities to communicate with host national students, which suggests institutions ought to create opportunities to involve host national and international students in diverse extracurricular activities, where international students can connect with their Chinese peers.

This study's students chose China as their overseas study destination and were mostly motivated by career prospects and a desire to integrate, so institutions should prepare their international students for a culturally diverse environment and develop their ICC. In order to achieve this goal, there is a strong expectation to build connections with the Chinese community to deeply understand Chinese culture. In this case, institutions could go beyond the institutional level and organise community-based programmes that offer opportunities to involve international students in community activities to meet with local people and develop social networks. Such connections with host nationals outside the institution context benefits international students who will

become more rooted in the host society, while developing a mutual understanding with host nationals and improving intercultural involvement.

Furthermore, findings of the present study suggest IC is not a one-sided issue and mutual understanding and effective communication cannot be achieved through the efforts of international students alone. Instead, the success of IC depends on both sides of interlocutors in IC. Here, this study highlights the importance of promoting intercultural education to a larger group of people, including, not only international students, but also host students, which necessitates the expansion of IC in higher education. Therefore, one implication for higher education is that intercultural education should include everyone in the higher education context. Higher education institutions should create a positive intercultural environment through a range of instruments and activities 'at home' to develop attitudes, knowledge and competent communicative skills of both international students and nonmobile domestic students in order to achieve effective IC. This, according to Beelen and Leask (2011), is understood as 'internationalisation at home'.

#### **7.4.3 Implications for Chinese as a foreign language teaching**

The data from the participants' IC experience suggests that a lack of language proficiency is the biggest obstacle in their daily IC, which hinders mutual understanding and the establishment of friendships. Moreover, language issues are commonly recognised as the most salient and problematic marker of international students' social and cultural identity, which has an influence on their perceptions of

positioning and sense of belonging. In this sense, FLT should meet the academic requirements and social needs of students. However, as discussed in section 5.3.1, this study reveals that participants lacked opportunities for language practice in classes, as teaching methods focus on grammatical rules and vocabulary, rather than language practise. This study suggests that FL teachers ought to be open to students' needs and new ideas, and make requisite changes in their practice; for instance, as participants mentioned, they could apply communicative language teaching methods or create more relevant activities for language practise. It is believed that a communicative approach offers opportunities for communication in the target language, through which learners can develop abilities in interpreting information, expressing oneself and negotiating meanings, in other words, communicative competence (Savignon, 2002).

As argued in Chapter 2, it is necessary for FL teachers to enhance the awareness of teaching language and culture in an integrative way (Byram, 2009; Liddicoat, Scarino, Papademetre, & Kohler, 2003). This study confirms the inseparable relationship between language and culture and the crucially important role that culture plays in IC as informed by their IC experience (see section 4.4). In addition, the formation of stereotypes and the misinterpretation of nonverbal communication were shown to bring difficulties for IC and are formed by a lack of host culture understanding (see section 4.5, 4.6). In this case, this study suggests enhancing every teacher's awareness of involving the target culture into formal teaching and deciding which cultural

components contribute more to IC, because negligence could hinder the students from gaining a robust understanding of the target culture.

The findings of this study have potential implications for a better understanding of the relationship between essentialist and non-essentialist views of culture. Culture is an important concept that relates closely to IC and influences how people understand themselves and others. Participants in this study occasionally used national cultural categories to construct their reflections and understandings, or used them as a default way to think about how they are different from others, indicating an essentialisation of culture and cultural groupings. They also tended to think of individual behaviours, and process information about an individual as constrained or defined by Chinese culture. Various authors (Gutierrez, 2002; Holliday, 2013; Tadmor, Chao, Hong, & Polzer, 2013) have argued that holding an essentialised view of social groupings can lead to stereotyping. On the other hand, others have highlighted that essentialist conceptualisations of cultures are not always negative and should not be completely rejected (Zhou & Pilcher, 2018). Recognising such conceptualisations contribute to a deeper understanding of participants' experiences because they are inevitably and often ineluctably drawn towards them (Dervin, 2016; Zhou & Pilcher, 2018). This has also been confirmed by the present study. As suggested by Zhou and Pilcher (2018), essentialist conceptualisations might be important for intercultural learning and should therefore not be completely dismissed within intercultural education.

Participants' IC experience and understanding and their expectations offer

opportunities for FL teachers to make changes that relate to designing explicit aims for intercultural teaching, addressing the components of ICC, and learning to teach and assess competence. The explicit aims for intercultural teaching, not only represent teachers' awareness of the significance of ICC in CFL teaching, but also equip them to design and organise a variety of appropriate activities in which intercultural perspectives are effectively integrated into FL teaching to develop students' ICC, and also to enable reflection and evaluation of their teaching practices. This echoes with the objective of FLT — to prepare learners' to face the multiple challenges and requirements set forth by global cultural and linguistic diversity and everyday interactions and to develop learners' abilities to manage communication between people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and identities, though they are less skilled than the native speaker in terms of the mastery of language (Coperías-Aguilar, 2010). In other words, language learners should aspire to become intercultural speakers, rather than the 'untroubled mythical' native speaker (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1998).

### **7.5 Limitations of the study**

This study focuses on the exploration of IC experience in a study abroad context, particularly looking at CFL learners in China, a group generally under-researched. Despite a careful design, this study has certain limitations, as do all studies, which are outlined as follows.

First, the present study focuses on investigating the lived IC experience of CFL

learners in China — the findings of the present study are exclusively based on international students' perspectives. While the voices and stories from other perspectives, i.e. that of host students, university staff members, or members of the host community, might have offered additional insights, this study intended to foreground the experiences of the students themselves. This may have created certain limitations, but it enabled an in-depth exploration of these experiences which the inclusion of other perspectives would not have allowed.

Second, the focus is on personal, subjective experiences and perceptions might be regarded as a limitation by some researchers. The participants' experiences have been (re)constructed in the context of semi-structured interviews and presented in the form of oral reports. The data analysis therefore relies heavily on data that consists of interpretations of experience, which 'could be subject to other interpretations' (Kunes, 1991, pp. 21-22, in Creswell, 2003, p. 149) when analysed by the researcher. However, the social constructivist approach taken to this research is based on the assumption that interpretation is a necessary component of attempts to understand and research the lived experience of humans. Efforts have made to reduce the impact of subjective bias. Measures such as member checking, explanation of data analysis, and inclusion of transcripts in the appendix have been implemented, which contribute to minimise the biases.

In line with the phenomenological approach adopted, the data collected provides insight into participants' perceptions, rather than an objective reality. Given this is not

directly 'observable', talking to people would be one of the most effective way for exploring and attaining such constructs (Kvale, 1996), which enabled me to probe emerging topics and broaden the scope of understanding investigated phenomena. Some guidance on research methods suggests that interview can be fraught with drawbacks. Ultimately it is impossible to know whether the participants honestly and openly shared their IC experiences as they were not observed directly by a researcher, and their verbal accounts may not accurately reflect the actual behaviour at the time. Moreover, data gathered might have included what has been described as 'distorted responses due to personal bias, anger, anxiety, and politics as the interviews could be greatly affected by the emotional state of the interviewee at the time of the interview' (Patton, 2002, p. 306), which could affect the validity of the accounts and put into question the accuracy of their memory. . However, this study was conducted from a social constructivist point of view and therefore specifically interested in personal perspectives and experiences, rather than regarding them as a disadvantage and threat to validity. Considerable attempts were made to develop a sound rapport and mutual trust between participants and researcher and adopting good interviewing practice, thus allowing the investigation of lived experience which is characteristic of phenomenological research. The way in which the approach taken enabled in-depth exploration of the personal and subjective was regarded as a strength rather than a limitation. For instance, during data collection phase, as detailed in Chapter 3, participants were given a choice of venue and the interviewing language in order to create an emotionally comfortable and supportive atmosphere to speak freely.

Moreover, efforts to make the confidentiality of using and reporting the data, and the anonymity of identity of participants were made for participants to feel safe to share their experiences and emotions openly.

Third, the employment of a single data collection method may lead to some limitations. The single-method approach is perceived to be ‘generally more vulnerable’ (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 141). It is undeniable that employing other methodologies such as participant observation, I could have observed how people interact and behave in IC and how identity is negotiated in order to gather data from a different source. However, it was not feasible to observe IC because of accessibility and time limitations. More importantly, this study investigates CFL learners’ understandings of IC and perceptions of ICC and identity, thus data collection should adhere to the social constructivist approach, and meanings are co-constructed and negotiated through interviews. In this sense, I believe I have collected rich data, despite this study undertaking the single method of interviewing.

Last, multilingual complexities emerged in this study because it involved participants from diverse linguistic backgrounds, but the interviews were conducted using two languages only — English and Chinese, in line with the capabilities of the researcher. This presented some limitations. Although being able to speak two languages is helpful to certain degree, depending on the language(s) used in the interview, participants could have been unable to express themselves fully and accurately using a foreign language, which could have created a sense of confusion. Moreover, as a

novice researcher, my skills represent a further limitation when conducting interviews to some extent. It is my first experience of conducting research, therefore some of the questions may be considered leading, when investigating participants' perceptions of identity, in the first a few interviews in particular. I was aware of this problem and made every effort to reduce such questions while conducting the interviews.

### **7.6 Direction for further research**

This study contributes to the literature on intercultural communication by investigating the lived IC experience among CFL learners and their perceptions of ICC and identity, particularly focusing on students in one Chinese University. More studies concentrating on students' IC experience from different sending countries in different universities would certainly enrich this domain and continue to enhance this study's findings.

Another issue that deserves attention from future studies rests on the discussion of CFL teaching inside classes as discussed in section 5.3.1. In this study, the data revealed that ways teaching CFL inside classrooms does not satisfy expectations. Yet, is this the case for everyone? This is crucial, particularly in FL education where developing communicative competence and involving communicative language teaching methodology is often emphasised. Further research could address what to teach, and how to teach CFL to develop ICC and meet students' expectations with a focus on CFL teaching.

Moreover, this study is oriented towards interrogating the conception of ICC through participants' reflections of their IC with native speakers of Chinese and their understanding. While participants' reflections can be insightful in comprehending IC, participants may have difficulties in recollecting their IC experience in detail. Some participants indicated this during interviews, i.e. '很久以前的事情了, 记不太清楚了' (*It was a long time ago. I can't remember it clearly*) (Tanaka, Japan). Or when investigating an issue in detail, I asked participants to give an example, and some said 'I forgot, it's a long time ago'. In this sense, it may be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study on intercultural students from the beginning in their early years of education abroad in China and continuing through a period of time to investigate how their IC is influenced, their ICC is developed and how their perceptions change. This may contribute to understanding the developmental and changing process of ICC more clearly. Instead of asking international students to reflect on their own IC experience and understandings, longitudinal research may enable participants to record their experience and understanding of IC in real time, affording more reliability of data. For example, participants can be asked to keep a diary about what they experience in IC, which can complement the collected data from later interviews.

In addition, the reflection of international students' lived IC experience highlights social realities. Meanwhile, the development of ICC is a process that involves all stages of education abroad. Moreover, this study focuses exclusively on participants' perspectives. Further research could involve other important stakeholders, including

native Chinese students, foreign language teachers and university administrators. For instance, by investigating domestic students' experience of making friends with international students, what barriers they have and how they overcome them may reflect upon the development of ICC.

### **7.7 Conclusion to the study**

Following a phenomenological approach, this study was dedicated to uncovering the complexity of IC from the perspective of CFL learners in a Chinese university by providing detailed description of participants' IC experience and meaning ascribed to their experience, forming their perceptions of ICC and identity. In addition to being a contribution to the literature on the conceptualisation of ICC, this study also offers contributions to research and educational practice.

As guided by a social constructivist approach, this study provides empirical evidence of international students' lived IC experience with native speakers of Chinese during their education abroad and their perceptions of ICC and identity. Accordingly, it expands previous studies on ICC and identity by investigating from a different perspective, which is a field that has been under-investigated in past research. This study therefore has shed light on the uniqueness, dynamics and complexity of individual sojourners' IC experience, thus is conducive to enriching current understandings of the IC experience, ICC and how identity is transformed during and after IC, which brings forth potential contributions to international students, foreign language teachers and intercultural researchers who conduct similar studies in the

same field.

Moreover, in accordance with research findings, this study has made some suggestions and uncovered implications on beneficial social and educational practices for those engaged in IC in the Chinese higher education context. The outcomes of this study hope to promote more efforts in developing ICC among CFL learners in Chinese higher educational institutions. It hopes that international students benefit from this study to function appropriately and effectively in an increasingly intercultural campus and society. This study uncovers a potential future research agenda, and I hope this study can be used as a valuable source of inspirations to others, and trigger further empirical inquiries to contribute to existing understanding of ICC and how it is developed, and to shed more valuable light other studies that investigate identities in intercultural (or study abroad) contexts across different sites.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Byram's (1997) *savoirs* for developing ICC (p. 57-64)

*Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.*

Objectives:

(a) willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, distinct from seeking out the exotic or the profitable.

The intercultural speaker is interested in the other's experience of daily life in contexts not usually presented to outsiders through the media nor used to develop a commercial relationship with outsiders; is interested in the daily experience of a range of social groups within a society and not only that represented in the dominant culture.

(b) interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices

The intercultural speaker does not assume that familiar phenomena/cultural practices or products common to themselves and the other are understood in the same way, or that unfamiliar phenomena can only be understood by assimilating them to their own cultural phenomena; and is aware that they need to discover the other person's understanding of these, and of phenomena in their own culture which are not familiar to the other person.

(c) willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment

The intercultural speaker actively seeks the other's perspectives and evaluations of phenomena in the intercultural speaker's environment which are taken for granted, and takes up the other's perspectives in order to contrast and compare

with the dominant evaluations in their own society.

- (d) readiness to experience the different stages of adaptation to and interaction with another culture during a period of residence

The intercultural speaker is able to cope with their own different kinds of experience of otherness (e.g. enthusiasm, withdrawal) during residence and place them in a longer term context of phases of acceptance and rejection.

- (e) readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction

The intercultural speaker notes and adopts the behaviours specific to a social group in a way which they and the members of that group consider to be appropriate for an outsider; the intercultural speaker takes into consideration the expectations the others may have about appropriate behaviour from foreigners.

*Knowledge: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.*

Objectives (knowledge of/about):

- (a) historical and contemporary relationships between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries

The intercultural speaker knows about events, significant individuals and diverse interpretations of events which have involved both countries and the traces left in the national memory; and about political and economic factors in the contemporary alliances of each country.

- (b) the means of achieving contact with interlocutors from another country (at a distance or in proximity), of travel to and from, and the institutions which facilitate contact or help resolve problems

The intercultural speaker knows about (and how to use) telecommunications, consular and similar services, modes and means of travel, and public and private

organisations which facilitate commercial, cultural/leisure and individual partnerships across frontiers.

(c) the types of cause and process of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins

The intercultural speaker knows about conventions of communication and interaction in their own and the foreign cultures, about the unconscious effects of paralinguistic and non-verbal phenomena, about alternative interpretations of shared concepts, gestures, customs and rituals.

(d) the national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of other countries

The intercultural speaker knows the events and their emblems (myths, cultural products, sites of significance to the collective memory) which are markers of national identity in one's own country as they are portrayed in public institutions and transmitted through processes of socialisation, particularly those experienced in schools; and is aware of other perspectives on those events.

(e) the national memory of one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own country

The intercultural speaker knows about the national memory of the other in the same way as their own (see above).

(f) the national definitions of geographical space in one's own country, and how these are perceived from the perspective of other countries

The intercultural speaker knows about perceptions of regions and regional identities, of language varieties (particularly regional dialects and languages), of landmarks of significance, of markers of internal and external borders and frontiers, and how these are perceived by others.

(g) the national definitions of geographical space in one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own

The intercultural speaker knows about perceptions of space in the other country as they do about their own (see above).

(h) the processes and institutions of socialisation in one's own and one's interlocutor's country

The intercultural speaker knows about education systems, religious institutions, and similar locations where individuals acquire a national identity, are introduced to the dominant culture in their society, pass through specific rites marking stages in the life-cycle, in both their own and the other country.

(i) social distinctions and their principal markers, in one's own country and one's interlocutor's

The intercultural speaker knows about the social distinctions dominant in the two countries e.g. those of social class, ethnicity, gender, profession, religion and how these are marked by visible phenomena such as clothing or food, and invisible phenomena such as language variety e.g. minority languages, and socially determined accent or non-verbal behaviour, or modes of socialisation and rites of passage.

(j) institutions, and perceptions of them, which impinge on daily life within one's own and one's interlocutor's country and which conduct and influence relationships between them

The intercultural speaker knows about public or private institutions which affect the living conditions of the individual in the two countries e.g. with respect to health, recreation, financial situation, access to information in the media, access to education.

(k) the processes of social interaction in one's interlocutor's country

The intercultural speaker knows about levels of formality in the language and non-verbal behaviour of interaction, about conventions of behaviour and beliefs and taboos in routine situations such as meals, different forms of public and private meeting, public behaviour such as use of transport etc.

*Skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own.*

Objectives (ability to):

(a) identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins

The intercultural speaker: can 'read' a document or event, analysing its origins/source e.g. in the media, in political speech or historical writing and the meanings and values which arise from a national or other ethnocentric perspective (stereotypes, historical connotations in texts) and which are presupposed and implicit, leading to conclusions which can be challenged from a different perspective.

(b) identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present

The intercultural speaker can identify causes of misunderstanding (e.g. use of concepts apparently similar but with different meanings or connotations; use of genres in inappropriate situations; introduction of topics inappropriate to a context, etc.) and dysfunctions (e.g. unconscious response to unfamiliar non-verbal behaviour, proxemic and paralanguage phenomena; over-generalisation from examples; mistaken assumptions about representativeness of views expressed); and can explain the errors and their causes by reference to knowledge of each culture involved.

(c) mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena

The intercultural speaker can use their explanations of sources of misunderstanding and dysfunction to help interlocutors overcome conflicting perspectives; can explain the perspective of each and the origins of those perspectives in terms accessible to the other; can help interlocutors to identify common ground and unresolvable difference.

*Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the*

*constraints of real-time communication and interaction.*

Objectives (ability to):

(a) elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents or events and develop an explanatory system susceptible of application to other phenomena

The intercultural speaker can use a range of questioning techniques to elicit from informants the allusions, connotations and presuppositions of a document or event and their origins/sources, and can develop and test generalisations about shared meanings and values (by using them to interpret another document; by questioning another informant; by consulting appropriate literature) and establish links and relationships among them (logical relationships of hierarchy, of cause and effect, of conditions and consequence, etc.).

(b) identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotations

The intercultural speaker can 'read' a document or event for the implicit references to shared meanings and values (of national memory, of concepts of space, of social distinction, etc.) particular to the culture of their interlocutor, or of international currency (arising for example from the dominance of western satellite television); in the latter case, the intercultural speaker can identify or elicit different interpretations and connotations and establish relationships of similarity and difference between them.

(c) identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction, verbal and non-verbal, and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances

The intercultural speaker can use their knowledge of conventions of verbal and non-verbal interaction (of conversational structures; of formal communication such as presentations; of written correspondence; of business meetings; of informal gatherings, etc.) to establish agreed procedures on specific occasions, which may be a combination of conventions from the different cultural systems present in the interaction.

(d) use in real-time an appropriate combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to interact with interlocutors from a different country and culture taking into consideration the degree of one's existing familiarity with the country, culture and language and the extent of difference between one's own and the other

The intercultural speaker is able to estimate their degree of proximity to the language and culture of their interlocutor (closely related cultures; cultures with little or no contact or little or no shared experience of international phenomena; cultures sharing the 'same' language; cultures with unrelated languages) and to draw accordingly on skills of interpreting, discovering, relating different assumptions and presuppositions or connotations in order to ensure understanding and avoid dysfunction.

(e) identify contemporary and past relationships between one's own and the other culture and society

The intercultural speaker can use sources (e.g. reference books, newspapers, histories, experts, lay informants) to understand both contemporary and historical political, economic and social relationships between cultures and societies and analyse the differing interpretations involved.

(f) identify and make use of public and private institutions which facilitate contact with other countries and cultures

The intercultural speaker can use their general knowledge of institutions facilitating contacts to identify specific institutions (consulates, cultural institutes, etc.) to establish and maintain contacts over a period of time.

(g) use in real-time knowledge, skills and attitudes for mediation between interlocutors of one's own and a foreign culture

The intercultural speaker can identify and estimate the significance of misunderstandings and dysfunctions in a particular situation and is able to decide on and carry out appropriate intervention, without disrupting interaction and to the mutual satisfaction of the interlocutors.

*Critical cultural awareness/political education: an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.*

Objectives (ability to):

(a) identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures

The intercultural speaker: can use a range of analytical approaches to place a document or event in context (of origins/sources, time, place, other documents or events) and to demonstrate the ideology involved.

(b) make an evaluative analysis of the documents and events which refers to an explicit perspective and criteria

The intercultural speaker is aware of their own ideological perspectives and values ('human rights'; socialist; liberal; Moslem; Christian etc.) and evaluates documents or events with explicit reference to them.

(c) interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges in accordance with explicit criteria, negotiating where necessary a degree of acceptance of those exchanges by drawing upon one's knowledge, skills and attitudes

The intercultural speaker is aware of potential conflict between their own and other ideologies and is able to establish common criteria of evaluation of documents or events, and where this is not possible because of incompatibilities in belief and value systems, is able to negotiate agreement on places of conflict and acceptance of difference.

## **Appendix 2 Participant Information Sheet (English)**

I would like to invite you to take part in an individual interview talking about your intercultural communication experience with native speakers of Chinese. Please take time to read the following information carefully and ask any question you may have before agreeing to participate in this study. Please also read and complete the Consent Form after reading through this Participant Information Sheet.

**Title: Perceptions of intercultural communicative competence: the intercultural experience of university students learning Chinese as a foreign language in China**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of learners of Chinese as a foreign language regarding intercultural communicative competence, based on their reflections on intercultural experience while communicating with native Chinese speakers and understandings of intercultural communication. It aims to provide a clear description of what students experience in intercultural communication and how they make sense of such experience.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. Whether you want to participate in the research or not depends entirely on your own choice. There is absolutely no compulsion. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences for you.

Your participation in this study will take approximately one hour. You have the right to refuse to respond to any question that the interviewer has asked. This interview will be recorded and transcribed afterwards, for the purpose of data analysis. The records and transcriptions of the interview will be kept secure and private. Access will be limited to the researcher only.

Please note that you will be identified by a pseudonym, and there will be no way to connect your name to your responses at any time during or after the study. The results will be used until the completion of the EdD project, after which all personal information will be deleted from the electronic files and shredded in paper documents. The research results will be provided upon your requests via the email address provided below. You will not be identified in any report or publication.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the School of Education Ethics Sub-Committee at Durham University. If you have any questions, requests or concerns regarding the conduct of the research project, you can contact the following:

Zhaoyi Liu, Researcher, [zhaoyi.liu@durham.ac.uk](mailto:zhaoyi.liu@durham.ac.uk)

## Appendices

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Nicola Reimann, Supervisor, [nicola.reimann@durham.ac.uk](mailto:nicola.reimann@durham.ac.uk)

Oakleigh Welply, Supervisor, [oakleigh.welply@durham.ac.uk](mailto:oakleigh.welply@durham.ac.uk)

### Appendix 3 Participant Information Sheet (Chinese)

#### 参与者信息表

我想邀请您来参加这个采访，谈谈你与以汉语为母语的人进行跨文化交流的经验。在您同意参加本次研究之前，请仔细阅读以下信息并提出您的任何疑问。请在阅读完本参与者信息表后再阅读并填写知情同意书。

**研究题目: Perceptions of intercultural communicative competence: the intercultural experience of university students learning Chinese as a foreign language in China**

这项研究的目的是以学生的对以往与中国人交流的跨文化交际经历的回顾以及理解为基础，调查将汉语作为外语的学习者对跨文化交际能力的理解和看法。研究旨在清楚地描述学生在跨文化交际的经历以及他们对这种体验的理解。

如果您同意参加此项研究，您将被要求参加一个采访。您可以自由决定是否参与此研究。如果您决定参与，您可以在任何时间选择退出，并且不会给您带来任何影响。

此项研究将会占用您大约1个小时。您有权拒绝回答采访者提出的任何问题。为了进行数据分析，此次访谈将被录音并转录。采访的记录和转录的安全性和隐私性也会得到保证。访问仅限于采访者。

所有包含您个人信息将受到保护，并且在研究期间或之后。在任何发表的报告中，您的回答都不会与您的名字联系起来。研究结果将会一直使用到EdD研究结束，所有的包含个人信息的纸质版以及电子版的文件将会删除或粉碎。研究结果将根据您的要求通过我下面提供的电子邮件地址提供。

此项研究将由杜伦大学教育学院伦理委员会审核批准。对于此项研究，如果您有任何问题，要求或想法，请通过邮件方式联系：

Zhaoyi Liu, Researcher, [zhaoyi.liu@durham.ac.uk](mailto:zhaoyi.liu@durham.ac.uk)

Nicola Reimann, Supervisor, [nicola.reimann@durham.ac.uk](mailto:nicola.reimann@durham.ac.uk)

Oakleigh Welply, Supervisor, [oakleigh.welply@durham.ac.uk](mailto:oakleigh.welply@durham.ac.uk)

**Appendix 4 Declaration of Informed Consent (English)**

Title of Project:

**Perceptions of intercultural communicative competence: the intercultural experience of university students learning Chinese as a foreign language in China**

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understand the information provided.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to decline to answer any questions or withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
- I understand that data collection will involve the use of recording devices.
- I understand that all of my responses will be kept confidential and secure, and that I will not be identified in any report or other publication resulting from this research.
- I understand that the researcher will answer any question regarding the study and its procedures and I may contact the researcher if I require further information about the research.
- I will be provided with a copy of this form for my records.
- I agree / disagree to take part in the above study. (Please circle as appropriate)

Any concerns about this study should be addressed to the School of Education Ethics Sub-Committee, Durham University via email to [ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk](mailto:ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk).

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Date	Name of Participant	Participant Signature
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I certify that I have presented the above information to the participant and secured his or her consent.

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Date	Name of Researcher	Researcher Signature
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**Appendix 5 Declaration of Informed Consent (Chinese)**

知情同意书

课题名称:

**Perceptions of intercultural communicative competence: the intercultural experience of university students learning Chinese as a foreign language in China**

- 我已经阅读了参与者信息表并且理解信息表中的内容。
- 我已经了解我的参与是自愿的。我可以在任何时候拒绝回答任何问题或退出，无需提供任何理由。
- 我已经了解采访过程将被录音。
- 我已经了解我所有的回答都将被保密并保证安全，并且我的身份不会在有关此项研究的任何报告或者其他出版物中被公开。
- 我已经了解研究者将会回答任何有关此项研究以及研究步骤的问题。如需要补充信息，可以联系研究者。
- 我将被提供一份知情同意书作为记录。
- 我同意/不同意参加此项研究。（请圈选其一）

有关这个研究的任何问题请提交杜伦大学教育学院伦理委员会，联系方式：

[ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk](mailto:ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk).

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日期	参与者姓名	参与者签名
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我保证我已经提供给参与者以上信息并且取得了他 / 她的同意。

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日期	研究者姓名	研究者签名
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## **Appendix 6 Participants' Bio-Data (参与者详细资料)**

### **Personal Information (个人信息)**

Name (姓名)

Age (年龄)

Gender (性别)

Nationality (国籍)

First language (母语)

Second or other foreign languages (第二外语或其他外语)

Major (专业)

### **Educational background (教育背景)**

Length of studying Chinese (中文学习年限)

Length of living in China (在中国的生活年限)

Certificate(s) received relating to Chinese language proficiency (汉语水平相关证书)

### **Previous abroad experience (国外经历)**

Which country have you been to? (你曾经去过哪个国家?)

Why did you go there? (出国的目的是什么?)

How long have you been there? (在国外生活了多久?)

### **Appendix 7 Pilot Interview Guide (English)**

#### **Motivations and expectations of learning Chinese in China**

Why do you learn Chinese?

To what extent do you think Chinese is important to learn?

Why do you come to China?

What motivates your communication with Chinese?

Do you have other expectations?

To what extent do you think your expectations have been met? If not, why?

#### **Experience of Intercultural communication in China**

How often do you communicate with native Chinese?

Who do you often communicate with?

Do you make friends in China?

Which ethnic group do they come from?

How do you feel about interacting with them?

Do you think you have many opportunities to communicate with Chinese? Why?

What language do you use when communicate with Chinese?

How do you feel about speaking Chinese?

What challenges do you experience when interacting with Chinese?

Do you think you have overcome the difficulties? If you yes, how do you overcome it?

If no, why?

#### **Stereotypes**

What do you know about China before coming to China?

Where you do know obtain this knowledge?

Do you find any differences between what you know and what you see?

How do you think this influence your communication with Chinese?

Now have your perceptions towards China changed? How?

What do you think is helpful for eliminating your stereotypes?

**Awareness of ICC**

What abilities do you think are necessary in order to appropriately and effectively communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds?

What do you think is a good way to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds?

How competent do you believe you are in communicating with Chinese?

In which aspect, do you think you are more competent? How do you develop this?

Do you notice any changes with the development of your competence?

**Identity related**

Can you define your identity?

Have you met something that make you feel isolated or not have the sense of belonging?

Do you think you identity has changed after living in China for a period of time?

Do you feel you are influenced by your experience in China?

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

### Appendix 8 Pilot Interview Guide (Chinese)

#### 学习汉语的动力和期望

1. 你为什么学习中文?
2. 你认为学习汉语在多大程度上是重要的?
3. 你为什么来中国?
4. 你和中国人交流的动力是什么?
5. 你还有别的期望吗?
6. 你认为你的学习在多大程度上达到了预期? 如果不是,为什么?

#### 跨文化交际的经验

1. 你多久和中国人交流?
2. 你经常和谁交流?
3. 你在中国交朋友吗?他们来自哪个民族?
4. 你觉得和他们互动怎么样?
5. 你认为你有很多机会和中国人交流吗?为什么?
6. 你用什么语言和中国人交流?
7. 你觉得说中文怎么样?
8. 在与中国人交流时,你遇到了哪些挑战?你认为你已经克服困难了吗?如果是,你如何克服它?如果没有,为什么?

#### 刻板印象

1. 来中国之前你对中国了解多少?
2. 你是从哪里知道这些知识的?
3. 你发现你所知道的和你所看到的有什么不同吗?
4. 你认为这对你和中国人的交流有什么影响?
5. 现在你对中国的看法改变了吗?如何改变的?
6. 你认为有什么有助于消除你的刻板印象?

对跨文化交际能力的认识

1. 你认为与来自不同文化背景的人进行适当有效的沟通需要哪些能力?
2. 你认为与不同文化背景的人交流的好方法是什么?
3. 你认为你和中国人交流的能力如何?
4. 你认为你在哪个方面更有能力?你如何发展这个?
5. 你注意到随着你能力的发展有什么变化吗?

身份认同

1. 你能定义你的身份吗?
2. 你是否遇到过让你感到孤立或没有归属感的事情?
3. 你认为在中国生活一段时间后, 你的身份改变了吗?
4. 你觉得在中国的经历对你有影响吗?

你还有什么要补充的吗?

### **Appendix 9 Interview Guide (English)**

#### **Motivations and expectations of learning Chinese in China**

1. What motivates you learning Chinese?
2. What motivates you coming to China?
3. What are the motivations for your communication with Chinese?
4. What expectations do you have about learning Chinese in China?
5. To what extent do you think your expectations have been met? If not, in which aspect and for what reasons?

#### **Experience of Intercultural communication in China**

1. How often do you communicate with native Chinese?
2. Do you have Chinese friends?
3. How often and in which situation do you frequently speak Chinese?
4. Do you think you have many opportunities to communicate with Chinese? If not, what do you think constrain your interaction?
5. Reflecting on your intercultural communication experience, what difficulties do you encounter when interact with Chinese people?
6. What cultural differences do you identify to influence your intercultural communication?
7. Do you think you have overcome the difficulties? If you yes, how do you overcome it? If no, for what reasons?

#### **Stereotypes**

1. Do you have preconceptions or stereotypes about China before coming to China?
2. Have you found any of your preconceptions or stereotypes about China has been challenged after coming to China?
3. Now have your perceptions towards China changed? How?
4. What do you think is helpful for eliminating your stereotypes?

### **Awareness of Intercultural Communicative Competence**

1. What do you think is a good way to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds?
2. What abilities do you think are necessary in order to appropriately and effectively communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds?
3. How competent do you believe you are in communicating with Chinese?
4. How does it influence your Chinese learning and your willingness to communicate with others?

### **Identity change**

1. Do you feel you have changed in any way? If yes, which aspect?
2. How does this change affect you, for example, the way you live, act and socialise with people, and perceptions?
3. In which aspect and how you think your changes have influenced or will influence in the future in any way?

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

### Appendix 10 Interview Guide (Chinese)

#### 学习汉语的动力和期望

1. 你学习汉语的动力是什么?
2. 你来中国的动力是什么?
3. 你和中国人交流的动力是什么?
4. 你对在中国学习汉语有什么期望?
5. 你认为你的学习在多大程度上达到了预期? 如果没有达到, 你认为有哪些方面的原因?

#### 跨文化交际的经验

1. 你和中国人交流频繁吗?
2. 你有交中国的朋友吗?
3. 你经常在什么情况下说汉语?
4. 你认为你有很多机会和中国人交流吗?如果没有, 你认为是什么限制了你的互动?
5. 回想一下你的跨文化交流经历, 你在与中国人交流时遇到了什么困难?
6. 你认为哪些文化差异会影响你的跨文化交流?
7. 你认为你已经克服困难了吗?如果你是, 你如何克服它?如果没有, 原因是什么?

#### 先入之见或典型的印象

1. 在来中国之前, 你对中国有什么先入之见或典型的印象吗?
2. 你是否发现在来到中国后, 你对中国的先入之见或典型的印象是不对的?
3. 现在你对中国的看法改变了吗? 是如何改变的?
4. 你认为有什么有助于消除你的先入之见或典型的印象?

#### 对跨文化交际能力的认识

1. 你认为怎样做才能与不同文化背景的人交流的人很好的交流?
2. 你认为与来自不同文化背景的人进行适当有效的沟通需要哪些能力?
3. 你认为你和中国人交流的能力如何?
4. 这些能力如何影响你的中文学习和你与他人交流的意愿?

#### 身份认同

1. 你觉得自己有什么变化吗? 如果是, 是哪一方面?
2. 这种变化是如何影响你的, 例如, 你的生活方式, 行为方式和与人交往的方式, 以及你的一些看法?
3. 你认为你的改变在哪些方面影响了未来或将以何种方式影响未来?

你还有什么要补充的吗?

Appendix 11 An Example of Coding in NVivo

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for a project titled "Perceptions of ICC". The interface is divided into several sections:

- Top Menu Bar:** Includes Home, Create, Data, Analyze, Query, Explore, Layout, and View. Below this are various tool icons for file operations (Open, Get Info, Edit), clipboard (Paste, Merge), formatting (B, I, U, Text), paragraph styling, styles, and editing (Select, Find, Delete, Insert).
- Left Panel:** A navigation tree with categories: SOURCES (Internals, Externals, Memos), NODES (Nodes, Chapter 4, Chapter 5, Chapter 6, Cases, Node Matrices), CLASSIFICATIONS, COLLECTIONS, QUERIES, and MAPS. An "OPEN ITEMS" section at the bottom lists "Stereotypes & Impressions" and "Studying Chinese".
- Table:** A table listing nodes with columns: Name, Sources, Referen..., Created On, Created By, Modified On, and Modified By.
 

Name	Sources	Referen...	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
● Skill of discovering	20	37	2017/10/25, 11:...	JOYCE	2018/7/26, 1...	JOYCE
● Language	24	59	2017/10/25, 11:...	JOYCE	2018/7/26, 1...	JOYCE
▶ ● Attitudes	1	1	2017/10/25, 11:...	JOYCE	2018/11/19,...	JOYCE
▼ ● Motivation	0	0	2017/10/24, 23...	JOYCE	2018/3/21, 1...	JOYCE
▶ ● Studying Chinese	28	50	2017/10/25, 09...	JOYCE	2018/7/25, 1...	JOYCE
● Coming to China	28	55	2017/10/25, 09...	JOYCE	2018/7/25, 1...	JOYCE
- Node Detail View:** Shows the "Studying Chinese" node selected. It includes tabs for "Summary" and "Reference". The "Reference" tab displays two references:
  - Reference 1:** "Internals\Interview\20170608 Interview with konishi" with 1 reference coded, 0.22% coverage. The associated text is "因为我的公司派我来学习汉语".
  - Reference 2:** "Internals\Interview\20170608 Interview with Tanaka 田中" with 2 references coded, 1.59% coverage. The associated text is "大学的时候吗? 因为中国人特别多".
- Bottom Panel:** A breadcrumb trail showing the navigation path: NODES > Nodes > Chapter 5 > Motivation > Studying Chinese.

Appendix 12 An Example of Coded Transcript (Excerpt)

I: Do you have stereotypes about China and Chinese people?

CAROLINA: Of course. For example, they are very cold, 冷冰冰的。但是我现在发

Stereotypes about China is not true

现中国人并不冷冰冰, 很热心帮忙, 这是我来中国之后才发现的, 所以来中国是

Coming to China is a good way of understanding target culture

一个好的了解文化的方法。我们经常说聊工作聊学习时就说 study like a Chinese,

Stereotypes about China is not true

中国人非常努力工作。Work very hard very hard, 但是来到这里我发现, 并不全是

这个样子, 他们不只是工作, 他们也玩。I also thought all the Chinese or most of

Chinese people's stereotypes about Carolina's country is not true

Chinese can do Kongfu or this kind of stuff, also there are a lot of Chinese asked me

你们南美洲人都在跳舞, 都不是正确的。因为我们太远了, 我们没有机会互相

Causes of stereotypes

认识, 还有电影电视剧 特别是好莱坞, 他们有 stereotypes 什么是中国, Kongfu

Sources of stereotypes: movies

and fighting, all things are like this. You know when you don't know the person, you

use your ideas, your stereotypes to understand them, you think oh they are all like this

because I see on the TV. You are influenced by what you see in the movies, on the TV.

Sources of stereotypes: movies, TV

For example, in Chile, there is no Muslims, so you don't have the image of these

Importance of coming to China, learning FL, communicating with host people

group of people, what you see is all from TV, but I found it's not true, after I came to

Information received from TV may be wrong

China, I see a lot of people, they are different. So it's important to learn a foreign

language to communicate, to go to another country to meet different people.

For you and me we are in a foreign country so we can know more information from

Going to a foreign country contributes to gaining more perspectives, knowing that knowledge received is not correct

different perspectives. 我们可以知道更多也能知道我的知识是不对的。 If you are

Causes of stereotypes-stay in the bubble, in the comfort zone

in your bubble, you are in your comfort zone, people normally don't want to go out

the comfort zone, it's difficult I know, but you really need to go outside to see more.

(Stereotypes) going outside the comfort zone, see different perspectives, not listen to others

you will learn about if you go outside your comfort zone. You can have your own idea

about something, not just listen to others. You will know different points of view

about one topic because some topics are very sensitive, different countries have

different point of view, you cannot know all point of view, but it's useful for you to

know different points of view and have your own idea about that.

**Themes, categories, and codes arising from the coded transcript**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Codes</b>
<b>Stereotypes</b>	<b>Coming to China</b> contributes to changing stereotypes	A good way to understand target culture
		To communicate with Chinese people
		To gain more perspectives
		To know that received knowledge is wrong
	<b>Causes of stereotypes</b>	太远了 (too far away from target/foreign country)
		没机会认识 (lack of opportunity to know foreign people)
		Information received from TV is wrong
		Stay in the bubble
		Stay in the comfort zone
	<b>Sources of stereotypes</b>	Movies
		TV
	<b>Stereotypes are not true</b>	International students' stereotypes about China
		Chinese people's stereotypes about other countries
	<b>How not to have stereotypes</b>	Going outside the comfort zone
		Seeing different perspectives
		No listen to others
Having own idea about something		

### Appendix 13 Interview Transcript

20170625 Interview with YIXIU

*I: Could you please introduce yourself briefly?*

YIXIU: My name is Yixiu, I am from Ghana, Ghana is West Africa. My official language is English because Ghana was a former British colony, but we do have our own native languages, over 60 of them, I speak 5 of them.

*I: Have you learnt Chinese before coming to China?*

YIXIU: For my bachelor degree, my undergraduate, I studied in the university of Ghana, where I did English and Chinese combined major. I learn Chinese before coming to China and well after I graduated, I came here to do my master degree in Chinese linguistic and phenology.

*I: So you have classes with Chinese students.*

YIXIU: Yes, with Chinese students.

*I: Before coming here, have you ever been to other foreign countries and why did you go there?*

YIXIU: I went to Germany and Netherlands before came to China. I studied abroad in Germany for half a year and during that time, I visited Netherlands, but it's very short. It was an exchange program. I was in a research exchange program, where some universities working on some research and I also took some classes. But interestingly I came to China in 2012 for one year because for my university, you know when you are doing a modern language, like I was doing Chinese, you need to go one year abroad program, it's a requirement as part of the course, so I came here for one year before I graduated. That's after my 3<sup>rd</sup> year. It's more like a language immersion program, getting to the culture and getting to the language, that's the very first time that I came to China.

*I: How long have you been living in China?*

YIXIU: I was in China for one year and then I came back for my masters in September, 2015, that's been like 2 years, all together that's about 3 years. But the interesting thing is that I came to China immediately after my exchange program in Germany, so it's like I just came back from Germany, spent 2 weeks in Ghana, and had to come back to China because the time is very short, so it was a lot of, you know,

from here to there to there and everything is just mixed, that's an experience.

*I: How many foreign languages can you speak?*

YIXIU: Including Chinese, I speak some German, not very good and I learnt French because you know we have to learn French as a foreign language, just like our Chinese learn English, for like throughout our basic education, so I studied some French too but I think I forgot most of it, but I can still survive in a French environment.

*I: Why do you learn Chinese? I mean, what motivated you learning Chinese language?*

YIXIU: Well, good question. I would say it was by accident actually, because that was 2009, when I was going to the university in 2009, that year my university has a department of modern languages, where they have so many languages there. That year they had decided to introduce Chinese for the first time. That's the first time Chinese was included. At that time we did not have Confucius institute to do anything, so we did not know anything about Chinese. I applied to study a lot of languages actually because I wanted to English, French and Spanish, but the university offered me Chinese. I selected English, French and Spanish, but they gave me English and Chinese. Maybe they thought that I was interested in learning too many languages, because that was the first time and Chinese is not in the list of the courses for application, but they offered just a few people because they have to try it out and see if it would work or not. If it is not working, then they have to cancel the course, if it is working, they can continue.

*I: They may think you must be very good at learning foreign languages because you choose so many languages, so they offered you.*

YIXIU: Yeah, because everything I tick is language, language and language, well you love language, go do Chinese, so I was in the list. They offered Chinese to 15 people, 15 people came, just students came to learn Chinese, that was for the very fresh year. We came to do it because we had an option, my university runs a system where for your first year, maybe you have three, four majors, and after your fresh year you'll drop a major, so I'm like well, let me try it out, if after the first year, it's not working out, I can drop Chinese and continue with the rest, but it turned out to be ok anyway, so I study Chinese.

*I: Ok, this is your initial motivation of learning Chinese, it's not by choice. Before you*

*study Chinese, did you know anything about China?*

YIXIU: Just journey to the west, 西游记, that's all. Because when I was a kid, they used to broadcast a national television adept in English, I mean that was the only thing that I know about China and Chinese.

*I: So when talking about China, you will think about 西游记。*

YIXIU: Yes, like everybody flying, everybody fighting Kongfu, and everybody shouting shifu, shifu, that's the only thing. That's actually before I started learning Chinese, but when I started learning Chinese, I got exposed to a lot of things I mean, because our textbooks and stuff, we have the Chinese culture classes that combines everything because my teacher was always have the view that learn the language, when you know the language, you would understand the culture, that's his perspective. You learn the language, you learn it well and you would understand the culture more when you exposed to the culture because he knew we would go to China.

*I: So do you mean learning the language can help understand the culture?*

YIXIU: Yeah, he believes that we approach culture through language, not approach language through culture. If you know the language, you can understand more, you can understand deeper, otherwise, he could explain it to you, but you couldn't understand him. Like even I knew 西游记 but it's in English, I did not learn anything about the language.

*I: After learning Chinese and getting to know Chinese culture, so you find any difference between what you learnt and what you knew about China before? Because actually there is no one can fly and shout shifu.*

YIXIU: (Laugh) When I got here, it's different from what I see from the TV, it was like a normal country.

*I: You find a totally different China from what you knew.*

YIXIU: Yeah. But that's the problem you know most of what they teach in the culture classes, it's so different from what's happening now. Well it's true, that's maybe traditional culture, but it's so different, because for instance, they say, ok, when you greet somebody, you see in your book, you do this and when you say 'Thank you', you see this is how Chinese greet, but when you came to China, you find, no, it's different. And like Chinese dressing, in the book the only thing you see is like wear 唐装 and 中山装 and when you come to China, you don't even see it. It's true that is the culture, but that's is not what's going on everyday. But you know people who

are not being in China, if that is the only thing they see, they think that is what going on like every time. So it's like when I came to China, I see everybody in a 旗袍, but that's not the case.

*I: But you told me that your teachers are from China, they know what's like in China. Did you learn these from your teachers?*

YIXIU: My teacher, he barely taught it, he never taught it, but we know it because it's in the textbook, we saw it anyway. It's like at the end of each chapter, there is a culture thing, there is an English translation that you can read yourself anyway. And we just watch it and read it and we don't know if it is correct.

The movies that we watch is all about Asian China, there is nothing about modernday China, you know everybody is fighting. You know when I go to China, I realize that there are modern films, a lot of movies, we are like wow, China has this kind of movies because we only see the fighting movies. That is maybe because with the modernday movies, there is a lot of talking and if you don't understand Chinese, you cannot understand, but with the Kongfu movies, you don't need to understand Chinese, you just watch and you understand. And also, before you came to China, I thought every song is 京剧, because it's the only thing like I know about Chinese songs, 京剧 is this and 黄梅戏 is that. And when you get here and you turn on the video, or you go to QQ music or something, you don't see that. Actually you have to search very hard before you can find it.

*I: Yes, you find something different from what you know before and after came to China. As you said, learning Chinese is not your choice, after learning it, how do you think about Chinese? I mean how important do you think Chinese is for you?*

YIXIU: For me, personally, I wouldn't want to speak to Chinese, but I want to speak to language in general. Because I think that the language is a tool for thought process anyway. I mean besides communication, it also helps people to be able to think in a certain way, sometimes I just imaged that if we don't have language, how would I think, sometimes I think about it because when you are thinking, you are talking in your mind, and you are either thinking in Chinese or English. But I think language in general in Chinese for one, if you learn one additional language, it broadens your horizon, it broadens your scope because I mean if I can speak Chinese, I get to understand China, Chinese culture and Chinese thought, how Chinese people think, it's like you are just adding another form of processing thoughts and viewing things,

you see things from a different view.

*I: Yes, for one thing, you may have different ideas and you will see things from different perspective.*

YIXIU: Exactly. And when you approach things from various angles, you kind of have a global perspective to every situation, I wouldn't look at a problem like a Ghanaian, I will just look at a problem like a human being.

*I: Yes, if you know to approach things from different perspectives, you will feel easier to get used to different situations. Do you think it relates to your past experience? As you told, you have been to other foreign countries and you learnt different foreign languages, do you think it helps you to see things from different angles, not limited to one?*

YIXIU: Yes, that's very true, that's very true because one thing I realized was that you become less judgmental, like your idea of what is the standard is so different because let's say in Ghana, we have a standard for something, in China, the standard is different, in Germany, the standard is different, in Netherlands, the standard is different. So I mean being through in all those countries, it makes you more receptive, more accepted, so now you get to realize that it's just different. The fact that it is different does not mean that it is wrong, it's just different and you get to understand and live with that and you get able to live better with people because I mean if I know where you are coming from and you are doing something, I mean I wouldn't say, oh I know this is very wrong because I know from where you are coming, it's ok, it's just culturally different things. When you encountered something that is culturally different, you try to understand it, you try to understand it why that is the case anyway.

*I: Yes, people from different country would have different ideas, difference does not mean wrong.*

YIXIU: Yes, it's just different. In our own country, we have our standard, when somebody does something wrong, does something that is unaccepted, we may judge or criticize this person. Maybe for the foreigners, it's ok for them, it's fine. 我们用一个标准要求自己国家的人, 但是对于外国人, 可能只是文化不同, 所以要理解他们。 It also helps to live in another place, because one thing I realized was that I mean now I can live anyway in the world because I don't judge, that's why. Well, it is supposed to be different, but when I came to China and that's the experience I learnt

from Germany, you know, when I came to China, some of my friends were struggling to settle in, but I was not because I just felt that it is supposed to be different, I am not supposed to have any expectation, it's like oh it's a different country, it's a different culture, it's normal that everything is different.

*I: So you think it's better not to have.*

YIXIU: Exactly.

*I: Do you have any expectations about learning Chinese in China?*

YIXIU: No, You never feel disappointed as you don't have any expectation, you just get used to it, understand it and accept. Like if you go to the UK, you are expecting to eat 兰州拉面 and you get spaghetti, and you will feel disappointed, UK is different from China, so your expectation will influence you. UK is not China anyway, I am just hoping everything is so different and to accept everything, and it really helps a lot. You will easy to be satisfied with something different, with the change of your life style or accept something that may challenge your previous experience.

*I: You can feel more tolerant with the cultural difference as you know you must see cultural differences.*

YIXIU: That's very true. And sometimes you don't even know because you are thinking about one thing, you don't even know where you stand again, in the middle and everything is around you, but it's a nice thing, I think people should get to understand each other more and the best way to understand each other is to understand each other's culture, and I mean language is the most powerful tool to understand the culture of the people.

*I: Yeah, it's a vehicle to get access to the culture. You can communicate and you can know the culture.*

YIXIU: Yeah, when I relate to some of my Chinese friends, actually some of them don't feel I am a foreigner any more, because it's like, when I am around you, I can understand most everything that is going on, you don't have to explain to me, ok I am doing this because I know. Life gets easier.

*I: It seem you are involved in China and Chinese culture very well.*

YIXIU: Yes, I am.

*I: But when you came to China for the first time when your Chinese is not good, is there any situation that made you feel isolated, or make you feel you are not involved in Chinese, or have a sense of not belonging to China?*

YIXIU: Yeah, well, it happens a lot anyway, but sometimes you just have to get used to it anyway. I mean you just have to try to get used to it especially you know for our race, for instance, maybe Beijing is a little better, but if you go to a place and you've been walking and everybody is looking at you, maybe somebody pointing at you, and you can hear some funny things sometime, people think maybe you don't understand Chinese or you don't speak Chinese, so they are talking and you're just there, and you can understand, it's funny sometimes.

*I: How do you think about this?*

YIXIU: It is not polite, I think it's very rude because if you want to talk to me, just talk to me but maybe it's based on the assumption that you don't understand and sometimes you realize that you just let them talk, maybe they talk for a long time and when you are about to leave, let them know that you can understand, and then you know everybody goes like... you just say something to them in Chinese, I don't even tell them I know they're talking about me, I just say something in Chinese. They will like oh you can understand, that kind of thing. It happens, but I think in China, well, I don't know how to put it, but I find, for many people I think it's a line between ignorance and I don't wanna call it races, but it's more of ignorance I think, because people don't know, they don't know so they assume, they are going to be like, 'oh, it has to be this'. You know I was told that two people are arguing, they were like, one says, 'no way, that's the color', and the other is like 'no way, he doesn't bath, that's why'. Somebody came up with a tissue and they actually made a bet, and they just walk to him and they think he does not speak any Chinese and they were like (来擦一下皮肤, 动作). Sometimes is very embarrassing but what I wanna say is it's ignorance, because you will realize that for many of them they don't know.

*I: You think the reason for people doing this is because they do not know, they do not know the difference.*

YIXIU: Yes, because they don't know and they want to know. I realized sometimes, I talked with a lot of kids, it happens a lot; children ask me 'Why are you so black?' sometimes their parents get embarrassed. But it's fine for me, I think they are just curious about me. I remember there was a very small boy, he asked me '为什么是黑色的? 你没洗澡吗? '. I explained to him in a very funny way. I can understand people feel angry about it, but for me I prefer to think it's ignorance, and I can tell them if they don't know. You know sometimes their parents answer the child oh the sun is too hot in Africa, so you see it's

a high level of ignorance.

*I: For children, maybe they are just curious about this, because they see your skin color is different.*

YIXIU: Yes, the child is curious, and it's a child. We need to give the child the right answers because the child is learning and growing, but the thing is even most of the grown ups don't have the answers to those questions. So when the child asked, they don't know what to tell the child, so they just give them the assumptions, they just tell the child what they think and the child accept everything, that's what the child is going to believe for the rest of his life. So we need to be able to explain to them, but for the adults, their mind are made up already, it's difficult to explain to them, they done believe you.

*I: Actually how do you think about this kind of things? You said you felt it's impolite, do you think it has influenced your attitudes?*

YIXIU: For me personally, I don't know how somebody else would take it, but for me personally I think it's ok because everywhere you go, in every country you go, there are ignorance people and there are very enlightened people, there are very nice people, and there are always not too nice people, you know everywhere you go, it's very normal to find people who are nice and people who are not so nice, to find people who are helpful and people who are not so helpful, so it's not right to judge a country by what some people are doing, so I mean personally for me I don't see anything wrong, I just think that maybe we have to make an effort to increase or improve our intercultural communication. Because if they don't know, I mea if Chinese don't know much about us it's because we don't let them know. So we need to do something to promote my culture, to let them understand, but sometimes there is a problem that do we have a chance to do, do we have the opportunity to do that. Because we are here and the fact that we are here help us to understand these Chinese people. But very few Chinese people get to go out, and so they don't get to understand, it's one way, we have benefits because we are understanding Chinese people, but it's not the same the other way. Quite a lot of people interact with foreigners and they get to understand a lot of things, but it's not everybody who has the chance to do that. China is promoting a lot of culture, communication out of China, but I also think it should be a two way thing, to give an opportunity to promote out of China, we should also be sensitizing inside China, so we have a duo, we have something like this, we

benefit and you benefit.

*I: Yes, that's a good way to promote culture understandings. And going to a foreign country help with this because it gives a chance to know in person.*

YIXIU: Yes, exactly.

*I: For you, is this one reason for coming to China? What motivates you coming to China?*

YIXIU: First of all, the main thing that made me come to China to do my master's degree was that I had a scholarship. Before hand, because I took part in a worldwide competition, where I got a position that I award a scholarship, so that was the biggest thing, because for postgraduate studies, funding is always the first thing you look out, if there is funding, why not, I mean why wouldn't I go. So that was one of the reasons I came to China. But even if I did not come to China, I went anywhere else, I would possibly still doing Chinese linguistics or something that relates to Chinese, even if it's not in China. And why is that because as I mentioned we are the first part of students learning Chinese in Ghana, which means that I mean there are still a lot of opportunities as far as Chinese is concerned in my country, unlike French, Spanish, and Arabic, where we have so many people speaking it, and in Ghana, Chinese is not the same. We are the first people to learn in Ghana, maybe you can find a few people who are in China before and came back, but we are the first people to learn it in Ghana. Over the years we had quite a number of an increase in Chinese people going to Ghana to invest and stuff like that. So I mean it crates a lot of opportunities and that is the main reason why I started to do Chinese because we are the people to start it, and it has a lot of opportunities, I mean you get to create a part for yourself, I mean it's like well Chinese in Ghana, there is nobody, you get to create something.

*I: You are the first a few people who learn Chinese, and there is a need for people who can understand Chinese in your country, in this case you will have a lot of opportunities and on the other hand, since you can understand Chinese, you can create opportunities for yourself to do something related to Chinese that other people cannot.*

YIXIU: Exactly, so that is the main reason why I started Chinese.

*I: For the scholarship and the future career*

YIXIU: Maybe the first is for the future career and the second is for the scholarship, and if I came to China, I can improve my language proficiency as well.

*I: So you want to do some Chinese related jobs?*

YIXIU: Well, I would like to continue with my phd.

*I: In China?*

YIXIU: Good question, but I am not too sure if I want to do it in China or anywhere else because almost everywhere feels the same for me, I can do it in China, I can do it in anywhere else, but not in Ghana anyway. Why? Let me explain. Because I've spend over 20 years of my life there, I mean I grew up there, so if I have the chance to go outside and know others, it's good because eventually I am gonna go back no matter what happens. Now I am still young, I have a chance to learn about other countries and other places, why not? I can go. So while I cam still preparing applications and a lot of stuff, but China is an option and anywhere else is an option. I am planning to move away from linguistics to do something more about relation to Asian, China-Africa relations, international relations to look at how China interacts with Ghana or African countries. For now I don't think I can do anything that is not Chinese related, my life is kind of tied to China.

*I: How is your life in China? Do you enjoy your life in China?*

YIXIU: It's good, I think.

*I: Have you ever encountered something that makes you feel uncomfortable or unhappy? Could you give me an example?*

YIXIU: I am very difficult not to be happy. But let me see, culture is very different, but I came to learn that difference is not necessarily bad, difference is new to me. If it is different, it's new to me. I just think that life in China and life in Germany, it takes time to adapt to things, things happen around you that you are not comfortable with sometimes, maybe let's talk about Germany always missing the bus, because it's always on time but the thing is it's too much on time. It's like you are running to catch on the bus and they see you running, but they don't stop or wait for you. China is more flexible that's basically one of thing that immediately, I am just talking about the first impression and it takes some time to get used to it. One thing is smoking in public, maybe you go to a restaurant to eat and somebody just...I still cannot get used to it. But I don't have choice and I have to live with it, when I went to a restaurant and somebody smoke, I just walk away because in my country, people barely smoke, you wouldn't see anybody smoking outside, even somebody smokes, you don't even know. The number of people who smoke is so few, we don't even have smoking zones

because you don't even see people smoking. And you never see 'No smoking' sign anywhere, because everybody understands that we are not supposed to smoke anywhere, so it's like a convention in my country. It's been three years and I cannot get used to it, and I cannot do anything to live with it, I just when I can avoid it, I avoid it, when I cannot avoid it, I just...不能也没办法. And the other thing is sometimes I feel I don't belong, I am excluded because when you are walking, people are taking pictures of you without telling you, that is so impolite. You know when you walk to me ask can I take a picture with you, I cannot say no because you are being polite. When I see people doing that, I just tell them, no. it doesn't feel good.

*I: Does this influence your life in China or attitudes towards China or Chinese?*

YIXIU: Yes, when I'm walking, people take pictures of me, that is so impolite but it happens a lot. I know I'm a foreigner but it makes me feel so uncomfortable. If I see them taking pictures, I will tell them stop and delete it. Sometimes when you see them taking photos but you don't know why do this because somebody takes photos and they are just laughing, 你都不知道他们为什么笑.

*I: How do you think about this unhappy experiences?*

YIXIU: I think it's not always bad, because when you experience it, you kind of being prepared when going to other places. You just feel like everywhere you go, it's normal that you wouldn't be happy with everything that happens, it's normal that you wouldn't be comfortable with everything that happens. I mean when Chinese people ask me 中国好还是你们那里好, I feel like, come on, you cannot ask this question because you cannot say 中国好 or 我们那里好 because every time you talk about the country, you cannot only talk about specific aspect, so maybe I will be like this thing in China is good, that thing in that country is ok, because everywhere you go, there will surely be experience that you would not enjoy too much and there would also be experience that you would enjoy a lot.

*I: In every country, there are sth good or bad.*

YIXIU: Exactly, even in my country, there are things that I am not happy about.

*I: So you will compare with different countries when you experience something?*

YIXIU: Yes, because I think comparison is very important, as the Chinese 不比不知道一比吓一跳, I mean it is only when you compare them, that you know So maybe I know that it's ok that everywhere is crowded in China and everywhere is empty in Germany, that's something, I mean comparison helps you to know the differences.

Otherwise, I mean let's face it. So when I know that, ok, this is what I know; if anything different comes, I only look at the difference and add the difference to it, that's all.

*I: Have you adapted to your life in China?*

YIXIU: Yes, I think I have.

*I: Do you think you have changed yourself for adapting your life here?*

YIXIU: I think the way you see things is different, you become more receptive and you become more open to accept people for who they are or situations for what they are. I mean instead of being sad everyday because maybe this is happening in China, you just get to understand it, this happens here and then you get use to it. As I mentioned earlier, I realized I become less judgmental, so if you meet different people or people have different behavior or culture, you become more acceptive, you get to accept them. But the way of life, I don't think it changed much, I mean I just think that when you see so different ways of lifes, you just think the most important thing is about you being comfortable. And as long as you are comfortable, it's ok.

*I: I have thought about my personal experience as an international student in the UK. I have been in the UK for 4 years and I think to some extent I have changed myself in terms of behaviors, thinking and life style. When I come back this time, I find a little difficult, I mean I may need time to adapt to Chinese way. Does this happen to you?*

YIXIU: Yes, a lot happens, but the change are so gradual, sometimes when you embraced id, you don't feel it is too much of a change, you only know that ok maybe in this country, it is more convenient, you cannot change the experience, so you have to live with it, or to deal with it.

*I: You experience different cultures, and you take some from each culture and then you see people who do not take much from other cultures, like your friends in Ghana, how will they think about you?*

YIXIU: In my country, you know, it's a problem. When you go back it's difficult to fit in, in many different ways, from the way you eat, the way you talk, the way you do everything, it changes. It's not easy to fit in, to settle in well. In my country, people are like, '他是出国回来的, 别理他'。让我觉得我在哪里都是外国人的感觉。But I think it's good thing I think we should have more people doing that, you are not too native, you are not too foreign, what we do is we pick up the best practices from different places that we experiences, and then put together and we live with it, I mean

you have this from here that from there, you just take the good ones. It's like we are a blend of so many different things. You know sometimes being too native is not... I wouldn't say it's good or bad thing, we are somehow in the middle. We are more accepting, we are more receptive to change, because I realize people who travel, the way they embrace change more than people who don't travel. Maybe you are in China throughout maybe let's say, you eat 兰州拉面, add spices but one day they don't add spice, you cannot accept it. But if you went to other places, they don't eat spices, you did not eat spices and when you come back you will accept it. 看到更多不同的就更容易接受不同的 sometimes I think when changes come, we can easily adapt to change as compared to people who are native because it's like you are holding on something and sometimes for people who don't leave their countries, I feel that there is a standard for what is correct, so this is correct, anything that is not this is wrong, and it's so difficult. And sometimes when they meet people from other cultures, they would have this 文化冲突 because you are holding onto one thing that this is the only right thing. I think people go to other cultures, you learn from them like 入乡随俗, I think that's very important, because in my country, you cannot if somebody gives you a pen, you cannot accept it with your left hand, you have to accept it with your right hand so for a lot of international students who come to my university, that is the first thing that you know they have to adapt, it is very disrespectful to do things with your left hand, in China showing respect is like with two hands, sometimes even if you give me something and 如果我右手有东西我也会道歉的, 这种文化是不能 withdraw 的。This kind of thing is you need to learn immediately when you arrive. Try to find the reason why it is this, why it is that.

*I: So the cultural differences are not always the bad thing because you can learn from them.*

YIXIU: Exactly, if you are not very 极端, then you easily adapt, you easily accept a lot of things. But if you are very 极端, then you will like why it is this? Why it is happening in the country? And they are easily to be judgmental, they will criticize others. Somebody was like what is different from I know is wrong, somebody is like how can people eat with two sticks, you give me rice and you give me two sticks, we use spoons and there are some dishes that we use our hands. That's why when you give something to somebody, that's why we are so careful with our hands because there are some dishes that we eat with our hands, so the right hand is supposed to do

everything clean and everything good and the left hand is supposed to do everything dirty and everything bad. Because when you eat, you eat with your right hand, so maybe if there is something dirty that I want to clean, I can only use my left hand to clean it, but here is so different.

*I: As you said, your identity has changed and people in your country also think that your identity has changed.*

YIXIU: Yes, I agree. My identity has changed. We all have so many identities, we have so many faces, we choose the situation and we present an identity, which identity fits perfectly — you come up with that. I mean our identity it's not just one, it's changing, it's not stable. But if we are not careful, then we are gonna forget about our own identities, then it gets so difficult even fits into our own countries, and our own cultures where we are from, which is a very difficult thing because as much as we go wrong, we should not forget because I mean for example you are Chinese and you go to UK for a long time but when you come back, you should at least feel Chinese.

*I: As people surrounded are most Chinese, how do you feel about this? Do you feel like a foreigner or part of them as you are involved?*

YIXIU: It's true, it is only when you leave your country and you realize that you are a foreigner. I mean if you are in China for all your life, you never know that you are a foreigner. When you go to the UK or when I went to Germany, when I came to China, that's the first time I started realizing that I am a foreigner. In China, China reminds you more about this because you like '老外', '老外', it's like ok every time you try to remind me that I am a foreigner. That is the thing, there is a lot of things going around especially in China, things remind you that yes, you are a '老外'. I actually wrote a paper on this '老外' thing because something I thought about for very long time, you know Chinese have so many different words for addressing a foreigner, you have a lot to choose from, from '外国人' to '老外'. You know the thing is sometimes when you walk on the street, maybe a little child or even a grown-up, 他们会说'看, 老外', every time they just reminding you that you are a foreigner. But I think we have get used to it.

*I: The addressing kind of makes you feel you are divided, excluded.*

YIXIU: Yes, I don't think it's appropriate for addressing people like this, and I think it is in China, I would see so many things maybe a heading of a thing, something something especially foreign students, it is actually only in China that I see foreign

students, everywhere else in the world is usually international students and when you hear international students, it doesn't make you feel that you are a foreigner, it's like 'ok, I'm an international student', but whenever you hear foreign students, foreign students, all foreign, you know, I am aware, please don't remind me. It's difficult because they constantly remind you, it's kind of exclude you. In other foreign countries, they didn't do it in the way of addressing. They don't address you as a foreigner, maybe because they are used to seeing so many people of different races, so it's just normal to have people of different races around.

*I: What do you think are important for you to live in such foreign environment?*

YIXIU: I think from my experiences, what I told to many of my friends who want to go abroad, I told them that 'Don't have any expectation', don't expect anything, just keep an open mind and just walk in there so you can accept everything, because if you have expectations, that's where you may feel disappointed. But when you don't have it, it's like I go there, I just go, explore and see what's in there, when you see sth different, you like oh it's different, I did not have a picture of what it is supposed to be, so I just accept it, what is good and what is more convenient, maybe I can learn from it. I mean because we are foreigners, you live here but we are still living between Chinese way of life and our own way of life. We take from ours what is convenient in China, and we add what is convenient in other country, I mean we take advantages from different cultures, and mix them together which may be the most convenient way. I think it's a balance, it happens when people expose to other cultures, but if someone hasn't been exposed to other culture, only have one culture, it is what sticks to you. I think you keep an open mind and you will find a balance and you mix them together.

*I: Anything else?*

YIXIU: It's very important to be open-minded, you need to be open to differences, and this is what I expect to see. If I'm open enough, I can accept a lot of things. So open up to have engagement at a personal level, talk to local people, you can understand more about them, you can change your stereotypes, and get involved. I can see how they see my country. I can also introduce my country to them and change their stereotypes.

*I: As you mentioned being open-minded helps with changing stereotypes, do you have any stereotypes about China or Chinese people before coming to China?*

YIXIU: Actually I never believe in stereotypes

*I: But before came to China, do you have any preconceptions about China or Chinese?*

*What's China like in your mind before you actually came here?*

YIXIU: If you say stereotypes, let me say this, actually I don't really think it's stereotypes, but Chinese people are so difficult to adapt the food to anybody else. You know, food, no way. Wherever you find Chinese people, they still eat Chinese food. I've met so many Chinese people, even in Ghana, you know even they have to use the local vegetables there, but they will cook in the Chinese way. Some even live there for many years, they never try the local food. That is not the same for the Westerns because many Westerns they are curious, they wanna try, but Chinese, they don't. 中国人对其他的方面也很好奇, they go and try it, but the food, that is the only thing Chinese just 没办法适应。They would try to eat it but they wouldn't want to eat it everyday, maybe once in a long time, they just want to try it.

*I: How often do you communicate with native Chinese?*

YIXIU: I often talk with Chinese people, I have many Chinese friends here.

*I: What are the motivations for your communication with Chinese people?*

YIXIU: Well, I am here in China, I think I need to communicate with Chinese people. 如果我都不和中国人接触, 来中国没有意义。而且和中国人聊天, 我可以 practice Chinese, 也可以 know Chinese culture and I can make friends with them.

*I: How often and in which situation do you frequently speak Chinese?*

YIXIU: I use Chinese everyday. 出去买东西, 去食堂, 和朋友们一起, 我都说汉语。和我们国家的人在一起, 或者 those who cannot speak Chinese, 我说其他的。

*I: Do you think you have many opportunities to communicate with Chinese?*

YIXIU: Yes, I have many friends and I use Chinese everyday.

*I: For you communication, have you ever found some differences between you and the Chinese culture? What cultural differences do you identify to influence your intercultural communication?*

YIXIU: I often talk with Chinese and find a lot of differences, I mean so many things in terms of values and beliefs, I don't even know where to start from. But after a long time, you just get used to it, but there are so many things because I think talking with a lot of Chinese people, I realize they have a standard for everything, there is like a national 标准 for everything, for instance a national 标准 for beauty, which is very 科学, it's like beautiful, less than 45kg, I was like, no. 每一件事情都有一个标准, 成绩怎么样, 家庭条件之类的, 合不合适也是, 哪个学校毕业, 收入多, 少

everything is outlined, I feel it's just so wrong because we are not machines, we are human beings, we are flexible. And I think Chinese live like a robot, in a robotic way, it's too strict. And in many places, that is so different. I have a friend, who is doing journalism, and she has to go to the gym everyday because keeping her figure was part of her course, if she doesn't keep her figure, and she graduate she couldn't get a job. Because what, she is fact, just because the 标准, and I think some of those come to your abilities and it's got so wrong because how I look should not affect what I can do. I feel its so wrong if you cannot get a job because you don't fit the 标准, 这个不科学, 因为有好多衡量标准. 比如中国姑娘喜欢白, 认为白 is beauty, you realize that in summer everybody is holding an umbrella. I mean you go to Western countries in summer, everybody is sitting in the sun to get tan. You know I think because some of these things that is why for us to interact because they have a standard white is beautiful, black is not. We have a standard like 白富美, 高富帅, some of these things shape how people think and see things, and everybody kind of agrees it. That is a problem.

*I: How do you think about this?*

YIXIU: I think everybody is entitled to the opinions, but when it becomes standardized across the nation, then it becomes a problem because you see a lot of Chinese girls are very slim but they are still struggling with how to be slimmer, that's a problem. I think that there are everything must not have one standard, like on single standard, they should be more, should be more embracing. So I think there are a lot of things that isolate people and cut people out, just because of the standard.

*I: Yes, sometimes the standards may categories people, to divide people. Based on your communication with Chinese people, what do you think is a good way to communicate with Chinese, or with people from different cultural background?*

YIXIU: I think there should be a lot of engagement with Chinese people maybe on the personal level and also on the broader level because for many Chinese people, they had a lot of stereotypes about other people, like if you are from 美国, you must be rich, even you are hungry here but you are rich as long as you are from 美国, and if you are from any part of Africa, then you are hungry because there is not enough food in Africa. You know that is because how we see things is based on the information you received, what you input is what we give out, so when we get less information then that what's happened. But we need to have a lot of engagement at the personal

level, where we talk to people, what we let people know and I think some of them are realizing that, but even though they realize it they don't want to change their stereotypes. And for somebody who knows you and maybe they met you for the first time and talk with you for 5 or 10 minutes, and they are like, 'No, you are not from Africa' and they start to question you and they are like 'are you sure you are not from the States?'. They don't question their information. They need to question their own perceptions, many people tend to question the real information they received. So it's like many Chinese people especially those who don't leave their country find it's difficult to accept new things, maybe they have this perceptions and this information and they are holding to it. They prefer to change everything around them but not themselves, that is the problem. To satisfied their curiosity, they perceptions they had already to fit it. That is what I think is a problem.

*I: For your communications, what will you do, or what have you done if it happened?*

YIXIU: We have to insist on letting them to know. We have to explain a lot to let them understand, 'look, it is not what you think it is', 'yes, what you are saying is true, but that is not what is happening everywhere'. It's like me thinking every Chinese can do Kongfu before I came because, I thought every Chinese can do Kongfu or can fly, that is exactly what you are thinking. Yes, it is true, but that is not the whole story because anywhere you go to, any country you go to, there are really good places and there are really shitty places, it happens. So we have to tell them the whole story.

*I: As we talked, the main reason about this is the information received is limited.*

YIXIU: Yes, it's the media. The media we know the bad news sale, good news don't sale anyway, so people get to know only the bad news. That is the problem.

*I: So for any communication, information or knowledge is importance.*

YIXIU: Yes, knowledge is really important.

*I: To what extent do you think you have become more familiar with China?*

YIXIU: The very first thing to know to interact with people was how people behave, how they think, how they see things, their viewpoint, so that was the very first thing. You know from the daily communication with Chinese people, the very first thing you get to know is how they perceive things, how their thoughts processes, their values, how they do things and how they react things. But when I came to China, I got a involved in a lot competitions, and they gave me an opportunity to learn a lot about the 历史,地理, 政治, a lot of other things because you need to learn a lot of cultural

stuff and that are really good stuff and material. I think that gave me an opportunity to really get to know a lot about China and Chinese.

*I: Do you think this information is important and useful for your communication?*

YIXIU: Yes, they are very useful. It helps to get involved in Chinese people and to learn Chinese because at least one thing it does is it does not make you feel left out because anything that anybody says you seem to know what it is and they don't need to explain to you. If it is easier talking to you, it'll be easier opening up to you. somebody said that speak to a man in his own language, I mean in a language he understand, you gets to his head, but if you speak to him in his own language, you gets to his heart. People is going to open up more to you when they see that well you speak their language and you don't at least speak their language, you also understand them, you understand everything, 一点误会都没有, 整体来说呢, 这样会拉近你们的距离, 所以有的时候不是实际的交流有帮助, 但是就没有陌生感对, 就是这样的。It gets easier because sometimes I find Chinese people really want to communicate with foreigners, but they are afraid. 但是他们会担心, 他们能听懂吗, so I think language is important because we need language to communicate.

*I: As you know they are willing to talk to you, you can talk to them.*

YIXIU: They are so willing, sometimes they are just shy. They really want to talk to you, it's very normal, when you go to a tourist site, everybody is looking at you, everybody wants to take a picture with you, when one person comes and ask can I take a picture with you, when you say yeas, everybody comes, but nobody takes the first step. So I think we need to do this.

*I: Yes, you may need to show them that you are also willing to talk and you are able to do so.*

YIXIU: Yes, exactly. I need to talk first sometimes.

*I: How competent do you believe you are in communicating with Chinese?*

YIXIU:我觉得, 完全没有问题。

*I: That's' all I want to ask. Is there anything you want to add or ask?*

YIXIU: No.

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