Being and Becoming: Narratives of Chinese international master's students in UK higher education

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Declaration

I, Eileen Elizabeth Laffan, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Signed:

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I would like to thank my family and friends, who have supported me and helped me through the highs and lows.

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I dedicate this thesis to my mother Sally and the memory of my father Bart.

Abstract

This thesis is a study of Chinese international master's students undertaking a master's degree at a UK higher education institution. This study explores Chinese international master's students' perceptions of their experience of an academic sojourn and how these perceptions can inform the professional services of the Student Experience Division. These perceptions are viewed through the lens of *Bildung*. *Bildung* as an educational concept looks at the transformative educational experience in a holistic manner to comprise the lived experience, these experiences, both academic and social, are termed educative practices. Through the concept of *Bildung*, I formulate a theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming' for the Chinese international student addressing the self, motivation as an investment and emancipation and freedom through educative practices. This study is set in the internationalisation of student experience with a specific focus on professional services in higher education institutions. The participants' narratives focus on the student experience, addressing their studies and experiences of living and studying abroad. The participants reveal perceptions of the self that transform through this experience and are examples of 'being and becoming'. This research was undertaken as a narrative study; qualitative semi-structured interviews were used to collect the narratives of five Chinese students studying at a UK higher education institution for their master's degree. The interviews were analysed using narrative analysis, and a narrative for each participant was co-constructed. This doctoral thesis aims to provide insights and develop a theoretical perspective in the field of internationalisation of student experience and apply this perspective to inform the development of professional services in the Student Experience Division.

Key words: *Bildung*, UK higher education, Chinese international master's students, student experience, Student Experience

Impact Statement

This study provides original knowledge in the field of internationalisation of student experience by formulating a theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming' from which we can view Chinese international master's students' perceptions of their academic sojourn. This perspective of 'being and becoming' can be applied to other cohorts of students. The theoretical outcomes of this study will contribute to the current literature in the field and provide insights that can be used in future research. Additionally, the research design of this study can be applied as a template to similar studies of international students where the focus is to understand international students' perceptions of their experience and their development of self.

The findings of this study and its theoretical contribution will be used to develop and enhance the internationalisation of student experience within Student Experience. As Student Engagement Officer (International) in the Student Experience Division of a higher education institution, I will use the outcomes of this study to influence my professional practice. This professional practice brings an international perspective to developing activities and projects that enhance the student experience. The completion of this thesis is particularly relevant and timely in my student engagement officer (international) role as the Student Experience Division at the research institution is undergoing a restructure, and the previous International Student Support Department has been transitioned out. The insights from this study will inform and develop support for international students going forward, specifically by understanding a particular international student community. Analysing the data collected in this study from a narrative perspective and co-constructing narrative stories with the participant storytellers will provide valuable insights to develop a programme of intercultural fluency for staff and students at the research institution.

The theoretical outcomes and the implications for professional practice will be employed in collaborative work with other key stakeholders in higher

education outside of the Student Experience Division, such as marketing and recruitment, faculties, and the students' union. Providing these stakeholders with access to these findings and theoretical outputs can influence and assist higher education across these areas. Regarding marketing and recruitment, having a better understanding of students' motivation and how they perceive their academic sojourn can assist in the information and promotion of the institution. The insights provided by the participants on their experience of the studies, the challenges they face and how they overcome those challenges can inform the development of equitable support within schools and faculties. The students' union is a key stakeholder in international student affairs; this study's findings can provide fodder for the students' union to advocate on behalf of international students.

This study's findings and theoretical implications will be disseminated to colleagues in the research institution where this study was undertaken and to colleagues in higher education internationalisation through publication and presentation at conferences. Specifically, this study will be presented at conferences that focus on international students and their experiences of UK higher education, such as the UK Council for International Affairs annual conference, and those in the field of student experience such as Advanced Higher Education and Wonkhe.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

"I can think a thing in two different sides, and I don't know how to describe another character for myself, but I think I am brave. Yeah, I'm brave to choose the way. Also, even if they are all wrong, I'm happy to face the difficult."

Yiwen, Interview Two

I begin this thesis with the quote above from Yiwen, a participant in this narrative study. Yiwen's quote refers to what the period of academic sojourn meant to her and how she perceives herself now. Through participant voices, I investigate these experiences, culminating in 'being and becoming' as a strand of theory to understand Chinese international students' perceptions of their experiences in their development of the self.

The focus on Chinese international master's students began organically when I undertook my Institutional Focused Study (IFS) as part of the Education Doctorate Programme. I began the research by looking at international students as a community. However, I only received responses to participate in data collection from Chinese students, which centred my IFS on Chinese international students. The findings from my IFS and the research gaps I saw led me to continue focusing on Chinese international students as a community, specifically Chinese international master's students.

Due to this study's specific nature and direction, I chose the title for this doctoral thesis: 'Being and Becoming: Narratives of Chinese international master's students in UK higher education.' 'Being and becoming' refers to the strand of theory I explore as a perspective from which to understand the perceptions and experiences of Chinese international master's students studying overseas in the UK. The reasons for using 'Chinese' in the title are twofold. Firstly, and most significantly, in the interview conversations with the participants, they expressed their Chinese identity as significant to who they are and their experiences of the

world. Secondly, this group of students has a particular perspective that readers and researchers may wish to read about and understand based on the participants being a group of Chinese students. The use of 'Chinese' in the title is not to 'other' this group of students but to present how they reflected on their experiences through their voice and how they spoke of their identity.

For this study, I interviewed five Chinese master's students; three participants were in their twenties and two were in their thirties. All participants came from urban areas in mainland China, primarily from eastern China, with one coming from the more geographically central Chinese city of Xi'an. When using the identifier 'Chinese' in this study, I am referring to mainland China as opposed to mainland China and its overseas territories. Three participants came from medium-sized cities and two from the much larger urban areas of Xi'an (as mentioned) and Shanghai. All five participants had lived in urban areas during their childhood and university undergraduate degrees.

Through the research process of data collection, it happened that all participants are female. All participants being female could have led me to focus on the participants' biological sex and gender identity. However, during the interviews and when the participants talked about their experiences, their sex or gender identity did not feature except in a few cases where they referenced familial expectations. This paucity of reference to their sex or gender identity could have been an area to explore; however, I made the decision not to take that path as part of this study because, from the participants' responses during the interviews, it was not relevant in their perceptions of their studying experience in the UK. Reference to this research decision is discussed throughout this thesis, specifically in Section 4.3.

The following sections discuss the context and background for this study, introduce *Bildung* as a conceptual thread, explore the term 'student experience', differentiate it from Student Experience and unpack the internationalisation of student experience as the area of study. The research questions and objectives are outlined in Section 1.5, p. 33.

1.1 Context and background

Undertaking a course in higher education is an achievement, and travelling overseas to do so presents a very particular case that I aim to explore. This thesis is situated in the context of UK higher education and the experience of Chinese master's students who travel to the UK to undertake their postgraduate courses. The study is in the field of the internationalisation of student experience.

The current context of international students travelling to the UK to study is threaded with an undercurrent of UK government policy and specifically immigration policy (Rizvi and Lingard, 2011; Lomer, 2017). The Labour government of 1999 to 2004 saw a positive and welcoming policy for international students which "fram[ed] international graduates as valued contributors to the labour markets" (Lomer, 2017). International students coming to the UK were seen as a platform to demonstrate the UK's growth and competitiveness in a global field. However, in 2010, a coalition government led by the Conservative party with the Liberal Democrats saw a turnaround from the previous policy and the beginning of what is often described as "the hostile environment" (Webber, 2019). The policy change of 2010 saw the implementation of stricter immigration regulations and the categorisation of international students as migrants, whereby the government wanted "to reduce net migration figures to tens of thousands" (Cameron 2011 in Lomer, 2017: 582). Though the above policies projected a reduction in the number of people entering the UK, in the case of international students, this has not deterred those determined to receive an education overseas. As the following paragraphs show, the numbers of international students and specifically Chinese international students have increased rather than reduced.

As a demographic group, Chinese international master's students studying in the UK have global, national, and local implications (Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), 2018). Beginning with the global context, China is the largest 'exporter' of students across the globe. In recent years, China has seen approximately half a million students return to China from academic sojourns. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education (2018), Chinese students have

tended to travel to the United States of America, the UK, Australia, and Japan. The numbers travelling for undergraduate degrees abroad stand somewhat higher than those travelling for master's degrees and PhDs (ibid).

Looking at the national context of the UK, Chinese international students stand at approximately one-fifth of the international student population in the UK. This number is currently over 130,000, as reported by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for the academic year 2019/20 and saw an increase of 20% from 2018/19 (HESA, *Where do HE students come from?* 2023). The representation of undergraduates and master's students is balanced, with a significantly lower number studying at PhD level.

As per the demographic data for postgraduate students provided by HESA, the proportion of female international students studying in the UK is higher than males. For the academic year 2018/19, this stood at 100,335 females to 73,755 males as non-UK domiciled students (HESA – *Who's in HE?* 2023). Concerning age, 105,190 students fell into the 21-to-24-year-old bracket, 41,150 were 25 to 29 years old, and 25,285 were 30 and above (HESA – *Who's in HE?* 2023).

Additionally, the subjects undertaken by the greatest number of these students were business and administration (HESA, *What do HE students study?* 2023). For this study, the respondents to the call for participation saw demographics representative of this national picture, predominantly female and studying for a master's in business management. However, the final group of participants were all female, with three in the 21-to-24-year-old age group and two who were 30 years old or more; three studied business-related subjects and two studied law, which also featured in the top ten subjects studied by international students for the academic year 2018/19 (HESA, *What do HE students study?* 2023).

At the local institutional level where this research was undertaken, hereafter referred to as the research institution, Chinese international students were again the largest representation coming from a single country (HESA, *Where do HE students study?* 2023). Furthermore, the balance between undergraduates and master's students was relatively even.

International students, and Chinese international students in particular, significantly contribute to the national and local economies of the UK. Recent research undertaken by HEPI (2018) has demonstrated this at national and local levels, including local constituencies. It is recognised that higher education institutions gain a significant amount of yearly revenue from international students (Altbach and Knight, 2007). In addition to, and one could say, more important than, the yearly revenue, international and Chinese international students enrich the student community (Montgomery, 2010). Chinese international master's students are studying in the UK with educational experiences that are very different from those of the UK academic system. We can learn much from their experience and input concerning classrooms and campus life (Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, Jing and Lifei, 2017).

Recent research has seen an increase in the number of studies focusing on Chinese international students studying in higher education contexts outside of China (Wu, 2015; Bamber, 2014; Heng, 2016; Yu and Moskal, 2018; Meng, Zhu, and Cao, 2018). This increase coincides with the increased representation of Chinese students worldwide (Meng, Zhu & Cao, 2018). Fervent interest h a s a r i s e n in how Chinese students perform in their courses in UK higher education and how they integrate into university life and UK higher education (Quan, Smailes and Fraser, 2013). Many of these studies focus on a particular aspect of the student's academic sojourn: general learning (Quan, He and Sloan, 2016), working with others (Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017), and friendship as a point of integration (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nylan and Ramia, 2008; Rienties and Nolan, 2014; Taha and Cox, 2014).

Throughout this thesis, I refer to studying abroad and studying overseas. In the context of this study, I refer to students who travel overseas to undertake a degree programme specifically, using 'to study abroad' and 'to study overseas' as action verbs rather than the noun 'study abroad'. Study abroad as a noun, often referred to as study abroad programmes, are incorporated in one's degree programme, usually undergraduate, where students undertake a term or a year in a partner university overseas (Rizvi, 2011; Knight, 2012).

When I began this thesis and the research, my role was as an international student support assistant. As I complete this thesis, the Department of International Student Support has been transitioned out of the Student Experience Division. I am now a student engagement officer (international) in the Department of Student Engagement and Enhancement in the Student Experience Division. My current role has a remit that includes internationalising the student experience across the student community. This position and remit are the professional contexts of this study explored through the research objectives.

1.2 *Bildung*: a conceptual thread

To investigate the internationalisation of student experience through the perspectives and narratives of Chinese international master's students, I use the conceptual lens of *Bildung*.

Originating in German educational philosophy (Humboldt, c.1794), *Bildung* does not have a direct translation into English and is often simplistically referred to as 'education'. However, if one were to translate it back to German, the result is not reciprocal. *Bildung* is the essence of being through education; the raison d'être of education and all that surrounds the experience of education. It is complex, involving the 'developing, shaping, self-formation and inner cultivation, and speaks to the holistic development of the individual, as well as [the] broader hope for a better society' (Horlacher, 2004: 409). In this study, 'holistic' refers to the whole or totality of something and specifically here the whole of the individual and their experience.

> *"It is the ultimate task of our existence to achieve as much substance as possible for the concept of humanity in our person, both during the span of our life and beyond it, through the traces we leave by means of our vital activity. This can be fulfilled only by the linking of the self to the world to achieve the most general, most animated, and most unrestrained interplay."*
>
> *(Humboldt, Horton-Krüger trans. 1999: 58)*

Humboldt's higher education model *Bildung* sees the pursuit of academic studies as core to students and how their lives around those academic pursuits play a role in their self-development (Humboldt, Horton-Krüger trans., 1999: 58-59). *Bildung* is '*personality development through education'* (Pritchard, 2004: 510 emphasis in the original) as it is 'an individual's lifelong journey to self-knowledge via their passage within the world' (Taylor, 2017: 421).

Bildung as a concept has been constructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed in many different forms. One can argue that it is malleable and can be applied based on the context and situation. This malleability aligns with relativism in ontology and social constructivism in epistemology; the philosophical foundations of this work are explored in Chapter 3. I take the perspective that a person's identity is also malleable and changing; it evolves, varies, and alters through our affairs, experiences, and interactions with the world around us.

> *"[T]he person has a self-soul-identity, is composed of durable inner substance, and that it is possible through educative practices, both to get to know oneself and one's inner core 'better', and to effect changes to improve oneself through education"* (Taylor, 2017: 424).

I agree that the above 'educative practices' and, in particular, higher education can facilitate one knowing themselves '*better*' (emphasis from the quote above). This aligns with a postmodernist perspective of *Bildung*, which places the self-

> *"as a multiplicity, as produced in and through fragmentation, as plural and contingent, as a set of locating co-ordinates not a fixed point; and see those engaged in higher education as knowledge wayfarers whose physical and ontological learning journeys are characterised by nomadic, erratic and recursive moves of un-learning, re-finding (out) or undoing of previous ways of knowing, rather than a teleology of self-improvement through educative practices"*
> (Stronach and Maclure, 1997 in Taylor 2017: 424)

The postcolonialists and postmodernists postulate a critical critique that the concept of *Bildung* is an 'assimilationist goal of Western education' (Taylor, 2017: 425) and that the superiority of educational values is based on geographical location. From a post-colonial perspective, using *Bildung* as a concept to view Chinese international students can be seen in this way. I acknowledge that this can be problematic. For this thesis, I do not interpret *Bildung* as a standpoint of Western education but as a lens through which we understand the purpose and meaning of education through the flows of global student mobility. This

perspective results in a holistic concept of education and internationalisation where each party: the higher education institution, the student, the local community, the student's host country, and the home country gives and gains.

As evidenced by the postmodern and post-colonial views, "*Bildung* might be enacted as a positive force in developing educative practices being in recognition of difference and diversity" (Taylor, 2017: 425). Furthermore, these educative practices are based not just in the seminar room or lecture theatre but across all facets of a higher education institution and its surrounding environment. The environment of this study provides an additional defence to the use of a Western concept to discuss Chinese international master's students. The UK is not only the geographical space of this study but also where the educational experience is taking place. I would argue that it is not only Eastern theories that can describe people from the geographical East or Western theories to describe people from the geographical West. Working on such a dichotomy perpetuates a divide that we can see today and one that continues the aforementioned colonial views of education. It is unfortunate, though, and an issue for higher education and research in educational studies that the flow of ideas has not been more reciprocal, which has been solidified by the use of English as the global language for research and business (Nunan, 2003).

Higher education, in its Humboldtian essence, can be seen as facilitating limitless opportunities. This perspective of limitless opportunities requires one to address the different ways higher education exists and how people acquire knowledge. Currently, this perspective includes the mobile concept of education that can cross borders through educational institutions setting up campuses abroad, using the internet and virtual learning environments, and even through social media and new communication networks (Sawir et al., 2008). The physical movement of an international student brings forth the question of why students travel to study when other alternatives may be available. This enquiry draws in aspects of Barnett's (2009) being, knowing and doing approach, where one places oneself physically in an environment for a particular purpose. For the international student, a period of study overseas is more than just the pedagogical knowledge of the classroom. It is also the experience of living and studying in another country and perhaps developing a sense of global citizenship,

finding independence, and navigating one's journey to learn more about themselves (Montgomery, 2010). From this analysis, I have drawn 'being and becoming' as the changing shape and self-formation of identity, the role that individual and collective agency has to play through the placement of oneself, presenting the idea of 'going somewhere' (Taylor, 2017: 425) through experience. The above resonates with the idea of *Bildung* as "an image of a learning society… in which the real encounter with who and what is other are a constant and continuous possibility" (Biesta, 2002a: 350).

Bildung is a conceptual thread seamed into all aspects of this thesis and is referred to throughout. In Chapter 3, I take the above assessment of *Bildung* and demonstrate how it shapes the conceptual framework of this study.

1.3 The student experience and Student Experience

This study refers to the student experience and Student Experience. Student Experience, both words capitalised, refers to the division in a higher education institution that works to facilitate, develop, and improve the student experience. The student experience is the student's journey as they traverse their time and studies at a higher education institution.

The student experience is a relatively new field of study that has emerged in higher education studies over the last twenty years. It has gained much traction in recent times. This study uses Temple, Callender, Grove, and Kersch's (2014) definition of 'student experience', which states that 'student experience is [as] the totality of a student's interaction with the institution'. Furthermore, Temple et al.'s (2014) conceptualisation is used in this study, which divides the student experience into the following areas: application experience, academic experience, campus experience, and graduate experience. This study acknowledges that lines across these areas are blurred; however, structuring the student journey as such can provide a more digestible picture of the different components of this journey.

In this study, I look at the academic experience: students' interaction with the institution associated with their studies, including elements of and discussion around academic aspects such as English language and interaction with classmates and academic staff. I also address the campus experience, which is the student life not directly connected with their academic life (Temple et al., 2014:3). In this study, I deem these experiences as educative practices (Taylor, 2017), experiences that, according to the participants, impact and influence their perception of their development of self through their academic sojourn.

Student Experience is a division of professional services at the research institution whose aim is to deliver on the student experience as part of the academic and campus practice. Student Experience comprises student support and well-being departments, careers and employability services, complaints and

appeal facilities, and the administration and student records system. The division may also consist of areas of work that facilitate the management of these services. I sit in a team in the Student Experience Division that works to develop and enhance student engagement, assisting other institution areas in improving the student experience and developing student experience strategies.

1.4 Internationalisation of student experience

'Internationalisation' is a broad term used to refer to varying activities with an international focus in higher education: de Wit and Altbach (2021) outline two streams under the umbrella of internationalisation. The first stream is that of "[m]obility, also known as 'internationali[s]ation abroad', is the most referred to activity in internationali[s]tion and takes in itself a great variety of forms" such as global mobility, global engagement, and partnerships, including study abroad programmes (Rizvi, 2011; Knight, 2012). The second stream is "[c]urriculum and global professional and citizenship development also referred to as 'internationali[s]tion at home" (de Wit & Altbach, 2021: 29).

International students have a presence in both streams outlined above as internationalisation abroad or mobility is often referred to in marketing and recruitment strategies to increase the number of international students coming to the UK for the economic impact through international student fees (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The economic importance of international students to UK higher education is evident. International students make up approximately 20% of the student population in UK higher education (HESA, 2021). Enrolling a high number of international students who pay overseas fees is economically advantageous for UK higher education institutions (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In addition to the revenue these students bring to the higher education institution, the local community and national economy benefit financially (HEPI, 2018).

Discussions on the topic of internationalisation have often been situated in a debate where internationalisation is conflated as an aspect of the neoliberal agenda (Bamberger, Morris and Yemini, 2019). In the context of the UK, this debate has been fuelled by policy changes on fees and student recruitment proposed by an outgoing Labour government and enacted by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. The ability of higher education institutions to separate the recruitment of students into two separate streams of international recruitment and home student recruitment has allowed institutions to generate a business model of recruitment not being affected by a number cap in the recruitment of international students (Tannock, 2013). Tannock (2013) has

described different models of internationalisation highlighting the call from several scholars

> *"for the embrace of social, intellectual and moral frameworks for reshaping the internationalisation of higher education in the country, as alternatives to the neoliberal model that is currently dominant and that tends to treat higher education as a commodity and international students as a profit-making export market."*
>
> (Tannock, 2013: 457)

Many of these calls have focused on the human rights of international students while preserving the market and as Marginson (2012) posits have not reflected much on the quality of education. These conversations and debates have rumbled on and seem ever more intertwined (Bramberger et al., 2019). Bramberger et al 2019 argue that internationalisation

> *"allows for a multitude of ideas and practices that at times may align and fuse with but extend beyond neoliberalism. It does not align with one particular understanding of neoliberalism and should be understood as a multi-faceted and complex assemblage of practices in which multiple intentions and ideas are interwoven with particular economic, political, social and cultural concerns which shift over time and space."*
>
> (Bramberger et al., 2019: 212).

The internationalisation of student experience in this study brings together the aspect of increased international student recruitment with the development of international, globally focused, and holistic campuses embedded through every aspect of the student experience (Temple et al., 2014). The above is supported by de Wit et al.'s definition of internationalisation as

> "the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a

meaningful contribution to society."

<div align="center">(De Wit, Hunter, Howard and Ergon-Polak, 2015: 29).</div>

To achieve the above, de Wit and Altbach (2021) argue that it is necessary to approach the internationalisation of student experience as an intentional process that is dynamic and responsive to local, national, and global changes. Much discussion has taken place on how internationalisation has impacted the student experience. Many of the polarised debates take a negative perspective focusing on the difficulties that have arisen from amplified international student recruitment (Leask and Carroll, 2011). The debates around the difficulties of the internationalisation of student experience have often placed the responsibility of such difficulties on the lack of integration of international students with home students and challenges around class interactions and group work; these aspects are discussed in depth as aspects of academic culture in Section 2.4, p. 48.

In this study, the perspective I take in addressing the internationalisation of student experience is how internationalisation should be embedded in all activities with all staff and students and celebrated for the richness it provides to university campuses (Montgomery, 2010). This viewpoint and how internationalisation can be carried out is an objective of my current role in the Student Experience Division as a Student Engagement Officer (International), focusing on student engagement, defined as the extent to which all students participate in purposeful learning activities (Spurling, 2007 in Leask and Carroll, 2011). It is with the recognition that

> "much learning at university occurs in the informal curriculum; outside formal learning environments and that these experiences can and should support the learning which occurs as part of the formal curriculum."
>
> <div align="right">(ACER, 2009 in Leask & Carroll, 2011: 651)</div>

Two aspects I take as questions that can inform my role in professional services are first, how higher education institutions can prepare home students for an internationalised experience at university, creating 'low-risk' opportunities that

provide experiences that do not affect formal grades, and second, how I, as a Student Engagement Officer (International), can support the internationalisation of student experience as an embedded culture in the Student Experience Division.

1.5 Research questions and objectives

This doctoral thesis study follows the Institution Focused Study (hereafter referred to as IFS) completed in February 2018. My IFS, titled 'The effectiveness of UK higher education pre-sessional English courses on the acculturative and academic transition of Chinese international students to the UK' addressed how Chinese international students adjusted to a London-based higher education institution. My IFS looked at pre-sessional courses and the impact they had on Chinese international students. The findings from the IFS presented academic adjustment as a core issue that significantly impacted their experience of studying in the UK. The findings also highlighted areas such as the location of the higher education institution, the role of technology, and how social network groups influence the adjustment to, and experience of, their academic sojourn.

Taking these findings and the literature on international students in UK higher education into account, I have found a gap in the research field that needs to be addressed. This gap is specific to Chinese international students and their transformation while studying for a master's degree. Numerous studies address different aspects of the field: international student experience across various nationalities and degree programmes (Montgomery, 2010; Bamford, 2008), various nationalities in a master's programme (Wu and Hammond, 2011), the academic adjustment of postgraduate Chinese international students (Quan, He & Sloan, 2016), and the motivations of Chinese female international students studying for a master's degree in the UK (Bamber, 2014). However, this study finds that a theoretical perspective that addresses a holistic concept of Chinese international master's students is missing. This thesis wishes to address this paucity through the research question and objectives outlined below.

Research Question

How do Chinese international master's students at a UK higher education institution perceive the impact of their sojourn on their development of self?

Research Objectives

Through the research question, this study aims to:

1. Reveal the experiences that Chinese international students perceive to impact their student experience during their master's programme. Through the conceptual lens of *Bildung*, I use the findings of this question to develop a theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming' for Chinese international master's students, which reveals their development of self when applied to their experience.

2. Demonstrate that *Bildung* is an appropriate conceptual lens through which to view the Chinese international master's student experience and can be used to form a theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming' for Chinese international master's students.

3. Unveil how, through a better understanding of the Chinese international master's student experience, the Student Experience Division can be developed to serve Chinese international master's students better, and as a professional doctorate, how the findings of this study can be used to inform and influence professional practice in higher education institutions and develop the everyday practices that view internationalisation as an ethos for the whole institution.

Previous iterations of this work included a second research question, which specifically asked how the findings of this study and forming a holistic theory speak to the professional context. However, on reflection, the question did not work as intended and I took the perspective that it would be better as an objective threaded through the whole thesis and research. The professional context of this study is a continuous note and framing it as an objective has provided the opportunity to reflect on the impact of the research and how the research question focuses on the development of theory. I present a stand of theory, and through the third research objective, I address how this strand of theory can connect with the professional context, diminishing distance and providing clarity and succinctness.

1.6 Chapter outline

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature and discusses previous research in the field.

Chapter 3 delves into the philosophical foundations of this study and explores a conceptual framework of *Bildung* as 'being and becoming' for the international student.

Chapter 4 lays out the methodology chosen for this study, presenting the research paradigm and strategy and the research methods chosen for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 5 discusses the ethical considerations and how they were dealt with.

Chapter 6 presents the case studies of the participants.

Chapter 7 answers the research question, drawing on the participant stories and the data collected to develop a theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming' for Chinese international master's students.

Chapter 8 explores how Chinese students' perceptions of their experience inform the professional context of the Student Experience Division, including recommendations for the division.

Chapter 9 looks at recommendations for future research based on the findings of this study.

Chapter 10 concludes the thesis, outlines the contribution to knowledge, and addresses the considerations for stakeholders in the student experience, with a note on the Covid-19 pandemic and final thoughts.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

As outlined in Chapter 1, this study focuses on the internationalisation of the student experience and a student's development of self as 'being and becoming.' In this study, I centre on a particular community of Chinese international master's students. Therefore, the literature discussed focuses on aspects of this community. The literature presented in the following sections has been chosen as it relates to the student experience, the conceptual foundation of *Bildung*, and the community of students being studied.

To explore the topic of Chinese international master's students 'being and becoming' through their academic sojourn, I introduce investment for the imagined future self to articulate international students' motivations. I provide the notion of belonging as a lens for the integration and adjustment of international students. As reflected in the student journey, academic studies play a large part in this transformative experience (Temple et al., 2014; Marginson, 2014; 2018). I discuss previous studies of international students enrolled in UK higher education through academic culture, focusing on relationships with academic staff and the deficit model, group work, and second language proficiency. In the penultimate section, I explore friendships and social networks as they are significant to the academic and social student experience. The literature discussion culminates by assessing student voice mechanisms and examining the relationship between international students and higher education professional services. This literature provides a holistic perspective and paints a descriptive picture of the student experience for Chinese international master's students.

2.1 Identity and culture

This study's research question addresses Chinese international students' concepts of the self. When discussing the self, identity and culture play a significant role. This section provides contextual notes on race, class, and gender in a Chinese context and how perceptions of Chinese culture are treated in the context of higher education in the UK.

2.1.1 Historical contexts of race, class, and gender in China

Our identities as humans are complex, and our identifying characteristics play a part in how we move and exist in the world. This section provides a historical background of race, class, and gender in a Chinese context, providing insight into the contextual backgrounds of the participants.

Since the formation of the People's Republic of China (hereafter referred to as PRC), discussions on race have taken a singular approach. Here, race is seen as a nationality (Dikötter, 2015), with the PRC founding ethnicity being the Han race and where 'people in China' are represented as one relatively homogeneous Chinese nationality of which minority people are organic parts (Dikötter, 2015: 129). Dikötter (1994) reflects on the concept of race in China through a historical review of Chinese texts and posits that it is a national identity that holds strong and that in the Chinese context, race is seen as a Western concept. It could be said that discussing race concerning Chinese international students is a Western projection on such students (Xu, 2022). Similar to the participants in this study, their national identity as Chinese is the aspect to consider when discussing topics of race (Zhao, 2006). The perceptions of Chinese culture in UK higher education are elaborated on in Section 2.1.2.

In terms of class, Goodman (2014) states '[c]lass in China is best understood in terms of the intergenerational transfer of compound inequalities of wealth, status, and power, rather than solely in terms of ideas of class and stratification drawn from the experience of socio-economic development elsewhere'

(Goodman, 2014: 6). Power and status are attributed to members of the Chinese Communist Party and to where one is situated, whether in an urban or rural area. As outlined by Goodman (2014), the last 50 years have seen some significant shifts in the living and working environments of Chinese people. In 1970, approximately 80% of the population lived in rural areas, and the population was primarily classified into three groups: workers, peasants, and political elites. In comparison, in 2013, approximately 50% of the population lived in urban areas, and a middle class had emerged consisting of professionals, managers, and entrepreneurs. The parents and grandparents of the participants of this study lived through the time of the Cultural Revolution and economic development.

Similarly, the representation of and attitudes towards gender in China have undergone significant changes since the formation of the PRC. A significant factor was the 'one child policy', a family planning policy restricting population growth and limiting families to having one child. As Zurndorfer (2018) reports, resistance to this was strong in rural areas where agriculture was key, whereas, in urban areas, it led to a more positive recognition of daughters. However, the restrictive policy has, in totality, "fuelled much personal frustration, strained family relations and endangered the demographic replacement level, which in the long run has rendered the care of the elderly problematic" (Zurndorfer, 2018: 362). Women's position in China has "greatly improved and indeed reached a parity with that of men by some indicators, although women remain disadvantaged relative to men in terms of labour income, positions of authority and housework" (Xie, 2013: 7). Another aspect that surrounds conversations of women and gender in contemporary China is marriage and the culture of hypergamy: marrying someone who is of higher social standing. As Xie (2013) describes, this has had a significant impact on the marriages of women from higher socio-economic status and, in turn, is shifting social trends of these women to marrying later or not marrying at all. For the five female participants of this study, who come from urban areas of China and are the only children in their families, their choice to study overseas may have some significance for their position in society and future life choices. As Bamber (2014) posits, a degree from overseas increases Chinese female students' marriageability and employability. This may be connected to the motivations of Chinese female international master's students

and their reasons for choosing to study overseas. However, to fully assess this as an outcome of their study experience in the UK would require longitudinal research encompassing their post-study life. This is not within the scope of this study, which focuses on the participants' lived experiences in the UK.

2.1.2 Perceptions of Chinese culture in UK higher education

Previous debates on understanding culture in higher education have highlighted how culture is often used simplistically to describe people from a particular country and geographical location (Montgomery, 2010; Marginson, 2010, 2012; Bodycott, 2012; Lomer, 2017). This perspective is not always the most helpful for university staff, academics, and students (Montgomery, 2010). It may not be the intention of these groups to assess and coordinate their thinking about others in this manner. However, it is prevalent in the higher education community (Jabber, Teviotdale, Mirza, and Mswaka, 2019). Examples of this at the strategic level in higher education are how international students are represented in the internationalisation strategies of higher education institutions (Buckner, Lumb, Jafarova, Kang, Marroquin, and Zhang, 2021) and where international students are positioned as a commodity in the neoliberal agenda (Xu, 2022).

Perspectives such as these often lead to stereotyping. Students from East and South-East Asia are often described as being 'Chinese' regardless of whether they are from China and are often labelled as 'Asian or Chinese learners' (Montgomery, 2010). As Marginson (2012) posits and Lomer (2017) reiterates, identity in discussions of internationalisation of higher education is 'assimilated to groups on national and regional levels and rarely considered are identities such as religion, social background, wealth, prior education, disability, gender or age' (Lomer, 2017: 9). In the case of China, this can, in the first instance, ascribe specific ideas and stereotyping of a student who comes from Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan as being of the same culture as mainland Chinese students (Bodycott, 2012), also assuming that all Chinese students are of the same culture, which is a misconception. Similar or common traits may exist in cultures, for example, experiences of Confucian heritage and policies of the PRC government (ibid); however, it would be naïve to think that all students who

come from China come from similar backgrounds (Lomer, 2017). As Montgomery (2010) posits, it would be more appropriate to address culture referred to in this field as small cultures or communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). As such, this study aims to be transparent and discuss the participants only in ways they refer to themselves (Xu, 2022).

Stereotyping in the higher education context becomes particularly unhelpful when used to group students from particular areas or geographical locations (Marginson, 2012) and make assumptions about these groups of people in, unfortunately, more negative than positive ways (Jabber et al., 2019). As Montgomery (2010) describes, how people who interact with certain students may hold a preformed idea; for example, Chinese students have low levels of English language ability. Then any interactions with students who struggle in conversation conform to this stereotype. Interactions with students who do not fulfil this assumption are often dismissed, perpetuating the negative stereotype (ibid). When discussing the student experience, this is unhelpful; it fails to be considerate to the student who may, for example, have issues with social interaction rather than their language ability.

Additionally, there is a paucity of research addressing how university structures such as professional services interact with Chinese students (Yu & Moskal, 2018). Existing research that discusses perceptions of Chinese students focuses predominantly on their classroom interactions with co-national and host peers (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017; Brown, 2008; Brown & Holloway, 2008). In my previous and current roles, I regularly interact with staff in the Student Experience Division who discuss particular national cohorts of students as problematic and challenging. In these interactions, more often than not, blame is placed on the students, and any communication issues are dismissed as solely related to language, such as Chinese students do not speak out in class, or sweeping generalisations, such as Chinese students cannot or do not think critically, Chinese students only talk to each other, are quiet, shy and introverted and do not engage (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006). Spencer-Oatey et al. (2017) discuss similar issues regarding academic staff and their perceptions of Chinese students. As a collective, these attitudes perpetuate

the othering of Chinese students and international students in general (Montgomery, 2010; Marginson, 2012).

What is needed and an aspect this study wishes to address through the third research objective and professional context of this study is how Student Experience can be developed to embed internationalisation as a fundamental pillar of how the support required by international students and Chinese international master's students, in particular, can be understood better.

2.2 Investment for the imagined future self

I have titled this section 'Investment for the imagined future self' to highlight how I present concepts of the self and motivation as investment as they come together through the lens of *Bildung* in the international student experience.

As discussed in the previous section, identity as a concept is complex; it is layered and made up of various aspects and sub-aspects and can often be challenging to define. Our identity is often in a state of flux, changing and developing through experience and transformation. It is influenced by many facets of the self, such as cultural norms, beliefs and behaviours, and education, whether in one's home country or abroad (Marginson, 2014). Marginson posits this as self-formation (2014, 2018) that can be more clearly seen in international students, as the changes are often more apparent. Marginson's self-formation looks at one's present identity in higher education and how students see themselves and their imagined future selves. "This imagined self is rooted in a self-forming identity (Volet and Jones, 2012; Marginson, 2014), where through the academic sojourn [experience] the student is empowered, independent, and a global citizen" (Laffan, 2018: 83). This section looks at how the imagined future self manifests itself in undertaking an academic sojourn overseas. It discusses the connections between studying overseas, motivation as investment, and the imagined future self and how one might address these through the concept of *Bildung*.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the impact of international students studying overseas in the UK is significant on a multitude of levels, including the rich contribution to campuses, the teaching and learning environment, and the financial impact on the higher education institution and the local and national economies. For the student, why they study overseas is explored through studies of motivation (Dörnyei, 2009; Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao, and Lynch, 2007). The literature available on this subject reports that for international students, and specifically for Chinese international students, the choice to study overseas is to increase one's opportunities in life by improving one's career prospects (Bamber, 2014). However, such a simple statement feels somewhat reductionist. It is evident

through the literature and various studies undertaken in this area that the decisions are difficult and complex, involving emotional and psychological labour and significant financial input. It is an investment in one's future and imagined self.

Investment has become a common term in the studies of language learning from a sociological perspective, which describes what a person gives to achieve (Norton and Toohey, 2011). Consequently, in this context, motivation as investment is the desire for students to undertake their studies abroad and is influenced by internal and external factors. Viewing motivation as investment in this way aligns with the concept of motivation prevalent in psychological and psychosocial perspectives of language learning and proficiency (Dörnyei, 2009). These internal and external drivers marry with the notion of an imagined future self, the person one wishes to become, and the membership of an imagined community that this gives. One could say that the internal aspect corresponds somewhat with the imagined self, while the external aligns with the imagined community. These levels of motivation as investment are embedded in the student's self-agency and an imagined future self, where undertaking a master's degree fulfils a version of themselves related to a future career, life, and family (Laffan, 2018; Bamber, 2014). The above factors tie into membership in an imagined community (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Norton & Toohey, 2011) that the student wishes to be part of, which, in turn, creates a future that leads to better opportunities across various facets of their life (Bamber, 2014).

For second language acquisition studies, the above imagined identity could be as a speaker of another language that provides membership in an imagined community and would entail having experiences that can offer more capital to an individual (Yu & Moskal, 2018). Capital can take many forms (Bourdieu, 1990). In this context, capital refers to the increased opportunities for their career and society based on an academic sojourn's symbolic, institutional, and cultural gains (Jones, 2017; Ushioda and Dörnyei, 2009). For Chinese master's students, this is often framed in their job and career prospects; if they have qualified overseas, they enter into an elite group in society that is internationally educated and world travelled. Members of this elite group may be seen as worth more for economic and political reasons (Rizvi, 2011; Knight, 2012; Yu & Moskal, 2018).

In addition to motivation as investment in the form of capital, we can also see motivation as investment in their academic studies. Student behaviour and engagement in seminars and lectures are often discussed, with many different views (Yu & Moskal, 2018). A student may not participate or engage in classroom or seminar activities for a multitude of reasons. However, students who do not participate in academic settings are often described as demotivated or unmotivated (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Norton and Toohey (2011) posit that labelling the student as lacking motivation is inappropriate and that their investment is still substantial. They may be looking elsewhere to fulfil that investment, whether in social groups, religious groups, or others (ibid). However, these practices sit outside the classroom and are often not considered part of the individual's learning.

Previous research shows that Chinese international students who undertake a master's degree abroad tend to demonstrate high levels of motivation (Laffan, 2018; Chirkov et al., 2007; Wu & Hammond, 2011; Bamber, 2014). In the context of motivation as investment, one could say that their investment is higher because so much more is involved in studying abroad. International students generally pay higher fees, have to spend long periods away from family and friends and live in a country where social and cultural practices may be unfamiliar. In addition, they undertake studies in an academic culture quite unlike how they may have studied before. One could say that for international students, and in the context of this study, Chinese international master's students, their levels of investment are complex, layered, and high stakes.

In this thesis, I bring together the holistic nature of the student experience through qualitative interviews and focus on the students' voices. Additionally, through the students' academic studies, social experiences, and pursuit of a career post-study, I reveal a fuller picture of motivation as investment through the conceptual framework of *Bildung* and its manifestation in the imagined future self. The following sections in this literature review provide insights and specific areas that support this.

2.3 Belonging and the student experience

An aspect of note in the student experience is how students may feel when they belong in their educational environment; this can be influenced by their idea of self, who they are and who they are becoming, as referenced in the research question. In this section, I discuss belonging as integration and adjustment and how this is felt through the stages of a student's academic sojourn. I refer to integration here as how students may feel as if they belong to their environment, and how they adapt to a changing environment (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). I wish to be careful here and not project the idea that I think students need to 'change' themselves to fit in with their environment. Moreover, I stray away from ideas of assimilation as I find them problematic, perpetuating a belief that international students are 'other' and somehow need to become the 'same' (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017; Summers and Volet, 2008).

What does integration mean for the internationalisation of higher education institutions? Much of the previous literature that discusses integration in higher education institutions focuses on how international students integrate into UK institutions. From previous studies in the field, the responsibility seems to be placed on international students to integrate (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017), a view often held in academic perspectives (Jabber et al., 2019). Spencer-Oatey et al. (2017) argue for integration to take place in academia at three levels: individual, community, and institution. I agree with Spencer-Oatey et al. (2017) that integration must happen on multiple levels by multiple parties and in more than just the domain of international students. I would argue that this is for all institution members, all students, both home and international, and all staff members, whether academic staff or professional services. We must view it as necessary with buy-in from senior management and leadership of the institution.

The trend is for higher education institutions in the UK to increase the focus of their institutional strategies on the student experience and the student journey. The value of an educational qualification has come under scrutiny, and institutions must clearly define what a student will receive during their studies (Barnett, 2009). Research has shown that though students enjoy being part of a

diverse cohort, a point comes where this satisfaction becomes dissatisfaction when the proportion of international students outnumbers home students (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017; Volet & Jones, 2012). These levels of satisfaction could influence how a student may feel as if they belong.

As the above argues, integration must happen at all levels and be threaded through higher education institutions' internationalisation strategies. In a similar vein and encompassing the holistic concept of *Bildung*, adjustments must be reflected in the student and the institution. *Bildung* highlights education as a transformative experience; if this is so, and as this thesis argues it is, how is this manifested for Chinese international students? Does this experience and student journey by its very nature lead a student to adjust to their changing environment either consciously or unconsciously? In Sections 2.4 Academic culture and 2.5 Friendships and social networks, I discuss aspects of this adjustment.

2.4 Academic culture

This study focuses on the experience of Chinese international students coming to study in the UK. Academic culture plays a significant role for these students and their journey during their academic sojourn. It is vital in the students' academic journey because it influences aspects of their sojourn that are not directly related to their studies. Through the concept of *Bildung*, this study views the sojourn through a holistic lens and, in answering the research question, examines the various aspects of academic culture and how they play a significant role.

Education systems have a specific culture, which is apparent in some of the struggles international students face when undertaking an academic sojourn abroad. Some of the issues reported mention students not engaging in class or being unable to think critically or challenge academic professors and lecturers (Quan, He & Sloan, 2016; Jabber et al., 2019). These issues are often stated as being because of the academic culture students come from; to some extent, this may be true, though it is more complex and layered and not as simplistic as being only the result of different academic cultures (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2017).

Varying aspects of academic culture may exist in a national education system that a student may have experienced. Additionally, academic cultures can be institution-based and exist at a school/faculty level; all of the above need to be considered when discussing academic culture. Immediately, we are presented with the 'supercomplexity' (Barnett, 2000) of higher education institutions and how a student may be experiencing their journey through an institution. Barnett's 'supercomplexity' identifies higher education institutions as layered organisations delivering education and knowledge, while also meeting the business needs of academic capitalism. Moreover, the sense of being *"in"* this space is compounded by continuous uncertainty as the various aspects of a higher education institution are disparate, with separate agendas and conflicting interpretations (Barnett, 2000: 1, emphasis in the original).

Much of the literature has attended to the above by taking different national cultures and assigning academic and cultural differences (Li, Chen and Duanmu, 2010; Quan, He & Sloan, 2016; Meng, Zhu & Cao, 2018). Furthermore, many studies have examined cohorts of students studying a particular course or faculty (Yu & Moskel, 2018; Bamber, 2014; Bamford, 2008). These studies may implicitly acknowledge the academic and cultural differences that exist, but that is often not explicitly stated. Section 2.4 Academic culture discusses some aspects that impact the international student community, specifically the Chinese international student community.

2.4.1 Relationships with academic staff and the deficit model

An aspect discussed in the literature is the attitude that international students are somewhat deficient. A common feeling on university campuses is that due to the struggles and challenges that international students may face, being a speaker of English as an additional language makes them inferior in some way (Heng, 2016; McDonald, 2014; Montgomery, 2010). However, as Heng (2016) posits, Chinese international students come from an educational, social, and cultural background that is different and at times the polar opposite of what they encounter on campuses in foreign countries. The attitude or view that a group of students is somewhat deficient is not helpful. This attitude denigrates the reasons why students undertake academic studies abroad. It implies that education in the UK is better than in their home country, rather than students travelling to the UK as many UK students do to other countries, to widen their experience and gain a more global perspective (Marginson, 2014). The deficit model attitude fails to address the full complexity of why students choose to study overseas, their motivation as investment (as discussed in Section 2.1), and why a significant representation of Chinese students study for a postgraduate degree abroad.

A common idea often discussed regarding Chinese international students and academic issues is that *they* [1] cannot think critically (Brown, 2007; Dooey, 2010; Quan, He & Sloan, 2016; Jabber et al., 2019). The above stereotype is not

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[1] 'they' written with emphasis to highlight the othering these views present.

justified. Often, no clear consensus exists on what criticality means or what is required to achieve it (Brown, 2007). This lack of clarity ties in with students not quite knowing or understanding what is expected of them. One could say that making a sweeping statement about a whole nation of people being unable to do something is quite damaging and does not help facilitate a student's understanding of what is expected of them. Significant academic and cultural differences exist between China and the UK and what is expected of students in different educational environments (Quan, He & Sloan, 2016). As a participant in my IFS study said, "It is not that we (Chinese students) cannot think critically, it is that we have never been asked to think critically" (Emma, Interview 2, Laffan, 2018). How can one be expected to have the language required to articulate a thinking process they have never been asked to do before? It takes time, space, patience, compassion, and understanding of students and their academic backgrounds.

Jabber et al. (2019) discuss the relationship between academic staff and international students, specifically Chinese students. They argue that Chinese students are a particular type of student and are often challenging to work with based on cultural attributes. Higher education institutions have a moral imperative to ensure that academic staff do not present these views. This results in a negative learning experience for the student (Montgomery, 2010). It does not fulfil what might be considered a vital aspect of an institution's internationalisation strategy to encourage more international students to the UK higher education context and deliver an international and global curriculum (de Vita and Case, 2003).

2.4.2 Group work

Group work is an integral aspect of many courses and curricula, an element of the academic journey in the student experience, and a contributing factor to the notion of *Bildung*. A recent focus has been on group work and multicultural working groups in UK higher education amongst home (UK domiciled) students and international students with specific references to Chinese students (Wu & Hammond, 2011; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017).

As discussed in Section 2.3, both home and international students have reflected on how satisfied they were with their course, with the ratio of international to home students being a factor. E xtant research on multicultural group work suggests that the course's subject matter offers a frame to see how successful these interactions may be. Subjects such as design and engineering have shown positive accounts of multicultural group work; students appreciate the perspectives and views that students from various backgrounds and cultures bring to the group or project (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). Any challenges presented to them are based on individual differences of personality rather than macro-cultural differences (ibid).

Conversely, business management and finance subjects offer a less optimistic view of multicultural group work. Differences in work style, approach, and viewpoint are based on cultural backgrounds rather than personality differences (ibid). However, English language ability is present in the discussion of multicultural group work. When students are described as having high English language proficiency, the challenges and difficulties were less as communication flowed more freely (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017; Harrison and Peacock, 2007; de Vita, 2002).

2.4.3 English language proficiency

English language proficiency is an aspect that is well-researched in the field of higher education studies and has significance for academic culture and the academic journey of international students, specifically that of Chinese international students (Chen, 2007; Copland and Garton, 2011; Banerjee and Wall, 2006; Dooey, 2010; McKee, 2012; Wu & Hammond, 2011). As discussed in my IFS, academic writing is a significant challenge for Chinese students. Chinese students are trying to learn content knowledge and expertise, how concepts such as plagiarism and citations are dealt with, the writing style of an academic essay, and the form of language used (Laffan, 2018), which is no doubt quite overwhelming.

An aspect of the student journey specific to international students, including Chinese students, is the English language proficiency requirement for students' acceptance of study. In addition, English language proficiency is a requirement of UK Visas and Immigration compliance and a part of the sponsorship license that an institution holds to provide Tier 4/ Student visa sponsorship to international students. A privilege given to higher education institutions in the UK is the ability to set this requirement themselves (UK Visas and Immigration, Gov.UK, 2013)[2]. A higher education institution sets the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) standard or English language proficiency required to study a particular subject through the degree course requirements. If a student meets all the requirements, including English language proficiency, they will receive an unconditional offer that allows them entry to the institution. If a student meets all requirements except English language proficiency, they receive a conditional offer. They then have the choice to retake the IELTS exam until they achieve the required score, or they can undertake a pre-sessional language course. As a specific aspect of the student journey for international students, this has a place in discussing the overall student experience and reflects the steps students must go through in their journey of becoming.

An aspect highlighted in the findings of my IFS study (Laffan, 2018) and previous research is that the IELTS exam may not be the most accurate determiner of a student's English language proficiency in undertaking academic studies overseas (Terraschke and Wahid, 2011; Wu & Hammond, 2011; Quan, Smailes & Fraser, 2013). Achieving a sufficient or high score on IELTS can lure students into a false sense of security regarding their academic English language abilities. One could hypothesise that it leads them to have a more difficult transition period and does not set them up for academic success (Quan, Smailes & Fraser, 2013). Furthermore, the writing section of IELTS may present an inaccurate view of how academic writing is undertaken in UK higher education institutions, which causes a shock as it is somewhat different (ibid).

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[2] The policy mentioned here was not relevant to the participants in this study. In October 2020, UKVI introduced a new immigration policy for Student visa holders, under which the allowance for institutions to set the English language proficiency required still stands.

The findings from my IFS (Laffan, 2018) outlined how academic language was a significant challenge. However, it is a challenge that coincides with an unfamiliar academic culture, learning how to interact and engage in a UK university classroom or lecture hall with professors, lecturers, and classmates. As discussed in my IFS, pre-sessional English courses were considered a valuable tool for their academic sojourn (ibid). They significantly impacted the participants' master's course regarding academic language and culture and how to adjust to the different educational environments.

2.5 Friendships and social networks

The friendships an international student forms are central to many studies of international students and their academic sojourn (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, and Todman, 2008). The first aim of this study is to reveal the experiences of Chinese international students through the conceptual lens of *Bildung*. Friendships play a role in the student experience throughout their academic sojourn and, as presented below, even before arriving in the UK. Friendships offer a lens through which we can see ourselves and feel a sense of belonging and who we are becoming. In this study, I use the terms 'friendships' and 'social networks' to illustrate the varying forms of interactions between students across these journey areas (Taha & Cox, 2014). Social networks allow us to look beyond nuclear friendship groups and how international students interact on social media and in spaces unrelated to their studies.

The many challenges with integration and social inclusion on UK university campuses with international students as a whole and Chinese students in particular are well documented (Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009; Wu & Hammond, 2011). Chinese students are often reported as having mono-cultural friendship groups, not interacting with their classmates, and being somewhat distant from other communities. However, many students describe feeling regret about not forming friendships with home students and other international students who are not part of their co-national group (Hotta and Ting-Toomey, 2013). This regret is often outweighed by the support and advice gained from the friendships they create with co-nationals. These mono-cultural groups offer a comfort buffer in the experience of studying abroad, where students can interact with others who speak the same language and are from a similar cultural background. This comfort filters down to academic friendships; discussing one's studies with other students who speak the same language helps them understand the course content and what is expected in assignments and lectures (Laffan, 2018).

Taha and Cox (2014) examine the social networks of international students as they progress through their studies; the findings show that students form relationship networks for friendship, studies, advice, and support. These different relationship networks change and develop throughout their sojourn and are generally 'based on sharing the same language, culture, commitment to study and/or programme of study' (Taha & Cox, 2014: 195). Similarly, an aspect found by Taha and Cox (2014) and supported by my IFS findings is the varying ways students use different situational contexts for relationship purposes. They choose to ask for advice and support from students they live with, form study relationships with those on their course, and create friendship bonds with co-nationals on their course or through events and activities on campus (Laffan, 2018).

Additionally, an aspect that has come to the forefront in recent times is technology, the internet, and social media (Arthur, 2017). Specifically, for Chinese students, this is discussed through WeChat, the Chinese social media platform. My IFS (Laffan, 2018) identified that social media and technology play an essential role in creating friendship groups that impact the transitional experience of Chinese international students. In the data collection for my IFS, participants were asked about technology and social media and how they engage with these as part of their sojourn experience (ibid). One participant in my IFS project provided interesting insights: they had connected with one specific friend through the WeChat group for the university they would attend. The students met and travelled to the UK and arranged to live together in accommodation off-campus. They stayed friends with that person all through their studies. WeChat is a vital tool for Chinese international students. It allows them to seek co-nationals attending the same university and possibly the same course, with forums and chat groups discussing experiences and offering advice (Laffan, 2018).

2.6 Student voice, Chinese international master's students and, Student Experience

A significant trend in UK higher education over the last twenty years has been the reflection on and promotion of the student's voice. Student voice is often described as a multitude of types of work that range from engaging with students' reflective practices on their course and their student experience, undertaking surveys such as the National Student Survey or Student Barometer to working with students as partners in designing their curriculum or student experience (Seale, Gibson, Haynes and Potter, 2015).

The National Student Survey (NSS) is often referred to when discussing student voice (Canning, 2017). It is used as a mechanism for students working towards their final year of an undergraduate programme to express their opinions on their higher education experience. The NSS represents a specific population but has an influence that spreads to the Teaching Excellence Framework and reputation scores in university ranking and league tables (Canning, 2017). It purports to be a mechanism that contributes to the decision-making of potential students. For the context of international students, its influence on university ranking can be a factor in the choice of international university students wish to attend. The Student Barometer is another traditional form of gathering student voices overseen by a global education company, i-graduate.org, and includes the International Student Barometer. Higher education institutions sign up to take part and are compared with other higher education institutions of a similar size. It surveys all students regardless of year or degree level.

As Canning (2017) posits, the above surveys are mechanisms that provide a standardised metric. Still, they do not encompass the totality of the student's voice, which "at its broadest scope, student voice includes any utterance or thought or perspective which comes from a student" (2017: 526). To work within such a scope, we turn to the relationship between student voice and student engagement. Voice in the first instance aligns itself with an outward expression, one with an observable gaze which rests upon it. This is a challenge as higher education institutions represent their interaction with student's voices as a visible

relationship of "participation, transformation and empowerment" (Seale, 2009: 995). Canning (2017) explores various theoretical lenses by which we can approach student voice as engagement, opening up a perspective that sees "the absence of an audible voice [as] not the same as an absence of engagement" focusing on "what students do as opposed to what they ought to do" (Gourlay, 2015: 409). Dewsbury (2015) amplifies that if we approach the 'study of student voice through a lens of "what happens" rather than seeking to represent student's voice, we have the potential to develop a less egocentric perspective of the world' (Dewsbury, 2015:15 in Canning, 2017:528).

In the context of this study and discussing the student voice of Chinese international students and masters' students specifically, we can see elements of a familiar engagement discussion from the classroom. Research in the field is insufficient, with few and limited studies (Turner, 2006). As mentioned in Section 2.4, Chinese international master's students are often described as being passive and less vocal with observable outward participation, while, as outlined in Section 2.2, investment for the imagined future self this should not be taken as a reflection of lack of engagement. This study takes that perspective, focusing on narratives of students describing their experiences through an alternative method. The research interviews were targeted towards them to listen rather than collate their perspectives as input to the power dynamics of a higher education institution. This allowed them a space to be heard about their experience as an individual rather than a standardised metric.

A core tenet of this thesis is the role of professional services in the student experience of Chinese international master's students. This study acknowledges the paucity of research on Chinese international students' engagement with professional services at a higher education institution through a review of the literature. Professional services in higher education are school administrative staff, student accounts, student registry, support and well-being services, and areas or departments named 'Student Engagement' or 'Student Experience', as discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 27-28. These institution areas are seldom examined in discussions of higher education and Chinese international students. However, they are a part of the everyday working practices of a higher education institution,

and one can imagine, though not necessarily stated due to the lack of research, that they are also part of the Chinese international student experience.

As Temple et al. (2014) presented, the student experience is the totality of the student's interaction with the higher education institution. This totality is the essence of *Bildung* as a holistic lens of a student and their journey. A student's interactions with a higher education institution's professional services are interwoven through this journey and closely connected with the concept of internationalisation in UK higher education and what that means. An increased understanding of the perspective and role of professional services is needed. Many higher education institutions offer staff development training on cross-cultural communication and working with diverse communities of students; however, as with many staff development courses, these are taken up voluntarily (Zhou et al., 2008). They can expand the current implementation of internationalisation strategies to include a campus-wide discussion on what internationalisation means to individual service areas and their staff members. This is discussed in coordination with the findings of this study in Chapter 8, reflecting on my position working in the Student Experience Division at a UK higher education institution and as Student Engagement Officer (International) in the Student Engagement and Enhancement Team.

Conclusion

The literature discussed above presents research regarding Chinese international master's students and their student experience. In supporting the research question and objectives, the literature review focused on each area's relation to the concept of *Bildung*. This literature review identifies a gap in the research: the perceptions Chinese international master's students have of their student experience and the institutional Student Experience Division. This thesis answers the research question 'How do Chinese international master's students in a UK higher education institution perceive the impact of their sojourn on their development of self?' by narrowing the identified gap and providing a theoretical framework of 'being and becoming' through the conceptual lens of *Bildung*. The following chapter discusses the philosophical foundations of this study and research, establishing the framework on which this research rests.

Chapter 3 Philosophical and Conceptual Framework

'At first glance, the linking of the self to the world may appear to be not only an incomprehensible expression, but also an overextravagant idea. On closer inspection, however, the latter suspicion at least will disappear, and it will be seen that once the true endeavour of the human spirit is perceived (embodying both its great vitality and its great impotence), it is impossible to stop at anything less.'

(Humboldt, Horton-Krüger trans. 1999:59)

Undertaking a doctorate and writing a doctoral thesis is a journey, and different aspects speak to and represent the researcher in different ways. I would describe this chapter on the philosophical and conceptual framework of this doctoral work as a representation of who I am as a researcher, where this work is in the context of Chinese international master's students, the field of internationalisation of student experience, and the professional sphere of the student experience.

This thesis is a story with a protagonist and actors. This study's philosophical and conceptual framework highlights the researcher's position as an observer and co-creator, addressing the participant's position as an observer of their own experience. As a professional and an EdD candidate, I also observe from a perspective embedded in professional practice. This observation can provide insights into and help me to develop a professional practice of working with Chinese international master's students and feed into overarching discussions of the international student community. This study presents a conceptual framework grounded in the concept of *Bildung* as a lens which, I propose, enables us to understand the life perspectives of Chinese international master's students and apply this understanding to professional practice in a theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming'.

Figure 3a below presents the philosophical and conceptual underpinnings of this study. The philosophical underpinnings of this study are grounded in a relativist ontology and social constructivist epistemology, the theories of both are discussed in Section 3.1. The ontology and epistemology provide a basis for the chosen conceptual framework of *Bildung* and the subsequent methodology, which are discussed in Chapter 4. Section 3.2 addresses *Bildung* as 'being and becoming' and its development as a strand of theory to explore the experiences of Chinese international master's students studying at a UK higher education institution.

Philosophical foundations
- Relativist ontology
- Social constructivisit epistemology

Conceptual framework
- Bildung as conceived by Wilhelm von Humboldt
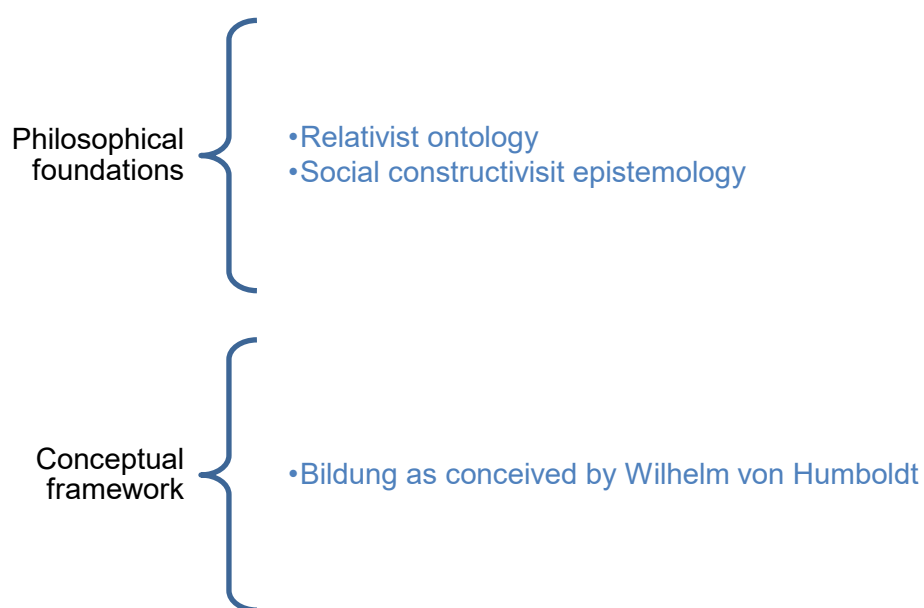
Figure 3a Philosophical and conceptual underpinnings

3.1 Theoretical perspective

3.1.1 Ontology

Ontology is the study of being and existence in the world, how reality is conceived in our world, and our experience of this reality. From a sociological perspective, this is the social reality in which we are positioned. The research for this thesis is based on the concept of *Bildung* as a lens to view the 'being and becoming' of Chinese master's students studying in UK higher education as a transformative experience. For the participants of this study, this reality is their experience of higher education as it relates to their journey through their world. Section 3.1.1 addresses the ontological foundations of this study through the concept of 'being', of which 'becoming' is also part.

Discussions on the ontological roots of 'being' are evident throughout the history of philosophy (Crotty,1998). Much that we have come to understand about the concept of 'being' has been through the writings and work of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger posits that 'being' is a fundamental existential concept; 'being' in its essence is ontological (Stambaugh trans. 2010:12). This existential essence is based on its nature and relationship to the individual being in the world (ibid). I take a relativist ontological position for this study based on how I perceive and understand the world, the philosophy of research, and the field of study. Crotty argues that for an ontological relativist, "the way things are is really just the sense we make of them" (1998: 64). This perspective resonates with how the concept of 'being' is indefinable. The essence of being indefinable gives 'being' its strength. It forces us to be transparent in our articulation of the subjectivities of reality (Heidegger, Stambaugh trans., 2010). Taking a relativist ontological position with the concept of 'being' allows us to look at the different worlds inhabited by individuals and be tentative rather than fundamentalist when discussing these (Crotty, 1998: 64).

The dichotomy between realist and relativist positions and how epistemology and methodology often fall into coherence have been discussed at an ontological level. A relativist position is commonplace when discussing

participants' lived experiences (Guba, 1992) primarily because the research perspectives of inquirers into lived experiences and narratives see the world through a relativist lens. An individual's life experience is bound up in context, time, place, and position, with their cultural and social background as a foundation for making sense of their reality and the world around them. Taking a relativist position, I assert that no determined or absolute ontological truth exists in the social sciences. The world we live in is continuously changing, and as human participants in that world, our viewpoint and frame of mind may also change. We are not pre-determined, not static.

> *"The findings of any inquiry are [literally] created, relative to the particular inquirer and to the particular context in which the inquiry was carried out. If either inquirer or context is changed different findings are created. The different findings are neither more or less true than the first, but only different."*

(Guba, 1992: 19)

As Guba argues, if an absolute truth existed in the social sciences, we would come to know everything, and any cause for further inquiry would cease (ibid). However, this is not to say that research undertaken in a realist ontology is not valid or valuable. All research is, but it is relative to the purpose, impact, and use of the research and findings. Many may find that working in a realist ontology answers what may be known about our social world and reality. That said, for this study and its ontological position, a realist perspective is seldom present in the canon of literature (Montgomery, 2010).

In this study, I discuss the participants' lived experiences, their position in those experiences, and the existential nature of 'being and becoming.' These lived experiences of being are not generalisable; they are an example of the strength of 'being' described by Heidegger (Stambaugh trans., 2010), the indefinable nature of 'being' due to the subjectivities of experience.

3.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is our understanding of how knowledge is created, constructed, and understood in our world. In conjunction with a relativist ontology, this study follows a social constructivist epistemology, whereby it is understood that meaning is constructed through our interactions with our social world. Social constructivism and the epistemological foundation that meaning is constructed on are comfortable in discussions of time, place, and the subjectivities of experience. This coincides with a relativist ontology and the concept of 'being' discussed by Heidegger in Section 3.1.1. Through an epistemology of social constructivism, we can bring further knowledge and understanding of the ways and means that people experience the world.

> *"It is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, developed and transmitted within an essentially social context."*
>
> (Crotty: 1998: 42)

How does the concept of 'being and becoming' align with social constructivism from an epistemological perspective? Drawing on authors such as Merleau-Ponty, Crotty argues that in social constructivism

> *"the world and objects in the world are indeterminate. They may be pregnant with potential meaning, but actual meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with them."*
>
> (Crotty, 1998: 43)

For Merleau-Ponty, knowledge is situated in a relationship between the subject and the world around them and emerges from that relationship.

> *"For the picture of knowledge which we arrived in describing the subject situated in his world, we must, it seems, substitute a second, according to which it constructs or constitutes this world itself, and this one is more*

authentic than the first, since the transactions between the subject and the things round about it are possible only provided that the subject first of all causes them to exist for itself, actually arranges them round about itself, and extracts them from its own core."

<div align="right">(Merleau-Ponty, Smith trans., 1962:370)</div>

Here again, we can see coherence between a social constructivist epistemology and relativist ontology, asserting the essence of 'being' and how it is the 'being' in the world relationship that provides knowledge and an understanding of how meaning is constructed and emergent.

The epistemology of social constructivism provides a foundation for the methodology of this study. The researcher observes the participant's life and makes sense of it as the participants observe their experiences and reflect on them in the role of narrator. I discuss these observations of the role of narrative in the research for this thesis in more depth in Chapter 4. When positioning research in a particular field, we acknowledge the underpinning and foundation of how one can form a thought. An ontological relativist perspective and social constructivist epistemology provide the philosophical space for the researcher and participants, with the co-construction of meaning taking centre stage. It acknowledges that context is critical and that an individual's history and life experiences are situated in a time and place. This acknowledgement acquiesces the audience's position in discussing the findings and outcomes. The audience in this circumstance is colleagues in the Student Experience Division and professional services and academics working in the internationalisation of student experience.

A social constructivist perspective fits well in the canon of literature on international students' sojourn experience (Montgomery, 2010) and as a philosophical foundation for studies undertaken from a narrative perspective (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Through descriptions of methodology and an assertion of the trustworthiness of the research, we can present the co-constructed knowledge as that knowledge presented in a specific context with particular participants; this refers back to Section 3.1.1 and Guba's (1992)

argument for the ontological interpretation of findings as not pre-determined. The participants' life stories are their truths as presented by them.

In this study, I apply the truths as presented by the participants to how I think about my professional practice focusing on the engagement
of Chinese international master's students in UK higher education. I am applying these truths to the internationalisation of student experience and how one can develop this area of work. The knowledge garnered from the findings of this study through an epistemological perspective of social constructivism constructs a theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming'. Section 3.2 on the conceptual framework of *Bildung* elaborates more on the shaping of 'being and becoming' as a strand of theory to discuss the transformative experience of an academic sojourn for Chinese international master's students studying in a UK higher education institution.

3.2 *Bildung* as 'being and becoming'

Several areas of study have influenced the conceptual framework for this study, from concepts and notions of what constitutes higher education and learning to second language acquisition research and linguistics to understandings of identity and identity formation, both psychological and sociological (Barnett, 2009, 2011; Norton & Toohey, 2010; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009). These perspectives are considered alongside the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of how this study approaches the world, reality, and knowledge. This section explores how *Bildung* can be implemented as a conceptual lens through which we can view and discuss the lived experiences of international students. *Bildung* is used to develop a theoretical perspective of being and becoming. It explores a period of academic sojourn as a transformational experience for international students that impacts their becoming of themselves.

A Humboldtian perspective of *Bildung* sees education as a tool for emancipation. Education as emancipation is the freedom to think; it is the freedom to be and become that can be explored and expressed through education and educative practices (Pritchard, 2004). Barnett (2009) discusses the ideas of knowing and being in higher education curricula. His perspectives on the 'becoming' of a student through knowing and being in the world and how the study experiences transform people into becoming students offer a perspective one can apply to international students. It is an idea of 'being and becoming', engaging with all aspects of the student experience and not just the curriculum and pedagogy that play a critical role but are not the totality of the student experience (Temple et al., 2014).

As part of the student experience, students also interact and engage with different services on campus and outside their university. They engage with administrative services and university facilities, have friendships, and attend university and non-university events, both social and academic. They may have part-time jobs and interests that are not university-related. These add to the layers of 'supercomplexity' (Barnett, 2000) of the student experience. In the process of 'being in the world' (Barnett, 2000: 1) in a higher education institution,

students may be attempting to balance their engagement with knowledge with the demands of educational capital, which can influence one's motivation as investment: Section 2.2, pp. 43-45. For international students, this attempt to balance can be seen more clearly due to the financial nature of studying abroad and being away from family and home (Marginson, 2014, 2018). Figure 3b presents *Bildung* for the international student. In a holistic perspective of the transformative student experience, the factors below are the foundation stones of the process of being and becoming.

Figure 3b *Bildung* for the international student

3.2.1 Dispositions and qualities of the self

Barnett (2009) talks of dispositions and qualities of the individual and the diverse roles these play. Barnett describes dispositions as 'the tendencies of human beings to engage in some way with the world around them' (2009: 433). On the other hand, qualities 'characterise an individual; they are the individual's character' (ibid). These dispositions and qualities are aspects of the individual that would lead them to engage with a prospective of ideas for their future. In the context of this study, what leads the student to think that studying overseas is a possibility and a route to their future self may be self-belief, courage, and adventurousness. These dispositions and qualities are influenced by our life experience, environment and aspects of identity, discussed in Section 2.1, pp. 38-42.

3.2.2 Motivation as investment

As outlined in Section 2.2, pp. 43-45, motivation as investment is the drive to take those dispositions and qualities that have influenced an image of an imagined future self and create action. It is the investment in the self for the imagined future self; it is the investment into the symbolic, institutional, and cultural capital, that provides their imagined future self with entry into an elite community that has a form of value. Its position in the framework outlined above is centre as motivation is fed from our individual qualities and dispositions as both internal and external drivers that influence and impact our decision-making. As stated above, I describe this motivation as investment due to the context of Chinese international students and international students in general whose choices to study overseas are financial, emotional, and psychological investments. It is a high-stakes activity with the payoff or return being the realisation of the imagined future self.

3.2.3 Educative practices

Educative practices can be seen in the community groups that students form and their experiences, positive and negative, of living in another country. The above is often more pronounced when discussing international students as the transformation is more noticeable and evident based on them being elsewhere than the environment and society where they grew up. They are removed from the familiar and have placed themselves in the other (Marginson, 2014; 2018). These activities and practices are part of the student experience and lead one to transformation and self-cultivation: what the individual/student does, the actions they take, and the experiences they have. Humboldt described these as the vital activities that link the self to the world around us (Humboldt, Horton-Krüger trans. 1999). As Taylor describes, through these educative practices one gets to "know oneself" better (Taylor, 2017: 424) and enact decisions that lead to improving and developing oneself through education (Pritchard, 2004).

The above framework of *Bildung* for international students may be true for all students, whether home or international. However, as Marginson (2018) posits and I have discussed above, one of the reasons these concepts are easily transferable in studying international students is that international students provide distinct parameters and transformations that can often be seen and described in concrete evidentiary ways.

Conclusion

This study explores how *Bildung* can be seen holistically through the international student journey and life experience of studying in the UK. This exploration provides insights into considerations for global higher education and students' experience. In this thesis, I address these aspects regarding Chinese international master's students and the professional context of my role as a Student Engagement Officer (International). However, scope remains for increased discussion of this with the research of other international student groups and domestic students. The broadening or widening of the scope of *Bildung* opens up what "Castle (2013) proposes [*Bildung*] as a form of ongoing discovery to find new ways of self-formation in a global world" (Taylor, 2017: 425). Chapter 3 has laid the foundation for developing a theoretical perspective of being and becoming through the lens of *Bildung*. Chapter 4 presents the research strategy and methods for exploring the lived experiences of Chinese international master's students.

Chapter 4 Methodology

When I began writing this thesis, I started with this methodology chapter; I have always found this a good starting point as, in the first instance, it describes the action of the research, what was done, how I did it, and why I did it in that way. In this chapter, the researcher often becomes the protagonist, describing the platform they wish to use to reveal the descriptive stories of the participants. In many ways, this becomes a story itself, following a form, structure, and chronology. Section 4.1 addresses the positionality of the researcher and Section 4.2 the research strategy and design, including the rationale for a qualitative paradigm through case study narratives. Section 4.3 introduces the participants and how they were recruited. Section 4.4 delves into the methods for data collection and the rationale for choosing semi-structured responsive interviewing as the method and technique for data collection. Section 4.5 discusses the data analysis and why narrative analysis was the form of analysis most apt for this research. Finally, Section 4.6 presents the criteria I used as a credibility check for validity and reliability in the qualitative study. References to the canon of literature discussed in Chapter 2 and the philosophical conceptual framework from Chapter 3 are made throughout.

Relativism and social constructivism
- Ontology and epistemology influence a qualitative paradigm and case study design

Narrative research
- Use of semi-structured interviews as the research method to bring forth the narratives

Narrative analysis
- Semi-structured interviews analysed to co-construct narratives
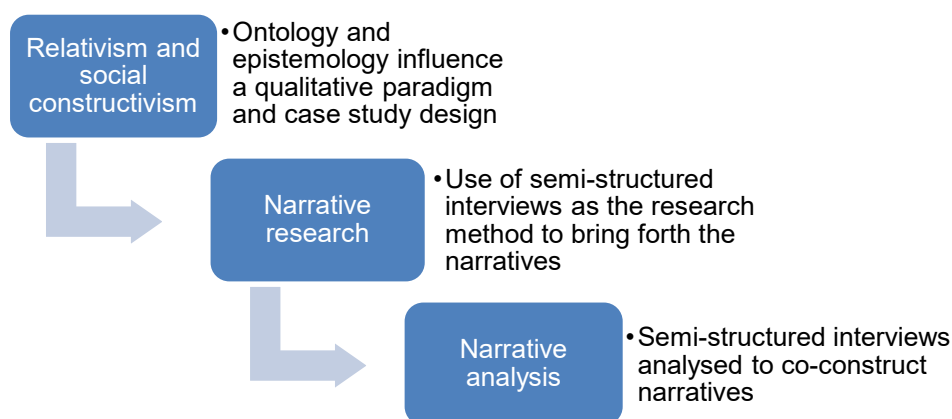
Figure 4a Structure of research strategy and design

4.1 Positionality of the researcher

In reading Pat Sikes' work on insider research, the positions one takes as a researcher and the decisions one makes, I was drawn to this quote, which represents the ideal research situation:

> *"Ideally people work on research which, in all its dimensions, accords with their beliefs and values and which matches their philosophical position/s with regards to ontology, epistemology and human nature and agency."*
>
> (2006: 107)

To marry the above notion with this study, I use my philosophical stance as a social constructivist with my research identity as a narrative researcher. To elaborate further, I understand us as human beings to be complex. In the same vein as researchers, we are multidimensional, and our positioning is often dependent on the different situations or research questions we are working with. This study is about my work in the professional services of higher education and with the students I support, which in this context are international students. As such, I take a position I feel is relevant to the study and research questions at hand. Though I play a significant role in this research, it is essentially not about me, it is about the participants, so I am a social constructivist as one of the many philosophical stances I hold as a person (Vicars, 2008). I am, however, in all positions a narrative researcher as I take the perspective that we perceive and understand ourselves and our social interaction through the stories we tell about ourselves.

As discussed in Chapter 2, identity is complex, and similarly, in the process of undertaking research, it may be difficult to distinguish which aspects of one's identity are influencing the frame of study and position of the researcher. For this, I take the learnings from my master's in educational and social research and the modules of the EdD on research approaches and understand my position as a social constructivist narrative researcher based on how I view knowledge and understand meaning as discussed in Chapter 3. From this, I take my experience of living overseas in a Confucian heritage society and working

with international students in the UK as the frames of reference for my professional and academic position and perspectives.

My stance as a social constructivist narrative researcher interpreting what was told by the participants in this study comes under scrutiny in my position as an insider. Insider research is commonplace in studies undertaken as part of professional doctorates such as the EdD, as a requirement of an EdD is often to provide a form of reflection on the professional practice of the inquirer (Sikes, 2006, 2010; Drake and Heath, 2008). The "insider positioning (their insiderness) is primarily important because it gets them to access particular people … and/or the phenomena that they want to investigate" (Sikes and Potts, 2008). The insider positioning in this context is my position working in professional services and being the first point of contact for international students who need support in carrying out activities as part of their student experience. Separating my identity as a researcher and my professional identity presented a significant challenge when they were interlinked in the course of the research and data collection, and as Smith (2009) suggests, this is how it is supposed to be: "the key outcome and processes for the professional doctorate relate to research knowledge and skill generated from and within a practice setting" (Lee, 2009: 146). For the research of this study and in my position as an insider researcher, I made decisions following my ethical values and beliefs based on what I felt were 'good' decisions (Sikes, 2006:106), "good in a moral sense, 'good' in terms of being sensible and appropriate and 'good' in evaluative terms" (ibid).

I approached the research and wrote it up with 'honesty' in the best way I saw it. I questioned myself repeatedly throughout the process, asking questions such as why I was undertaking this research and to what end, and whether I was representing the participants in the most accurate way possible. Much of this is subjective, and as a researcher, I am being true to myself and true to the participants of the study. I discussed with each participant how I was undertaking the research and how I would interpret our conversations. I shared with the participants my interpretations to create collaborative stories wherein the participants had the opportunity to alter what I had written and to agree that it was a true representation of our conversations as they saw them. As Sikes

posits, showing our interpretations to our participants is a "good idea" (Sikes, 2006:113) as a form of respondent validation (Sikes, 2010). Sikes essentially deems it "unethical to offer a version of someone's life without making clear the nature of the gaze that is being brought to bear upon it" (Sikes, 2010:13).

An additional aspect of insider research was discussing experiences with the participants that may be sensitive and assuring the participants that what was discussed in our interviews would be handled with care and sensitivity. Another cause for apprehension was how I would handle the situation if told something that would make the participant vulnerable or at risk, including if they discussed activities that may be contrary to the conditions of their Student visa. When discussing the consent form, I spoke to the participants about this and how I would need to put their safety first and follow the guidelines and protocols of the research institution. I also elaborated on my role as an insider researcher, that I was undertaking a piece of research as part of an EdD and held a professional services role in the Student Experience Division at the research institution. Through the information sheet and consent form, I determined that on signing the participants felt comfortable taking part. Further information and details on this study's ethical implications and considerations are set out in Chapter 5.

4.2 Research strategy and design

The research strategy and design for this thesis research are embedded in the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research questions. The research questions are centred on the concept of *Bildung* as transformation through educative experience, as witnessed in Section 1.2, pp. 23-26. *Bildung* is a layered concept, and as such, the research strategy and design for this project are themselves layered. In Section 4.2, I discuss how this research takes a qualitative paradigm in narrative research through the individual case studies of the participants.

4.2.1 Qualitative paradigm

As discussed in Section 3.1, pp. 62-67, this study comes from a relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology. In the field of higher education and international students, social constructionist perspectives of international student identity have focused on qualitative methods of research (Montgomery, 2010). Qualitative research methods are often preferred when exploring participants' rationale for undertaking a particular life trajectory. Of course, this is not to say that quantitative studies are not undertaken with a similar premise, but the data collected and their corresponding results often answer different questions. The rationale for a qualitative approach stems from the research question, the field of work, and the researcher. This research aims to holistically develop a branch of theory, 'being and becoming', from the experience of a particular cohort of students. This branch of the theory is developed through the lens of *Bildung*, exploring higher educative experience as a conduit for transformative life experience and layered in a student's motivation as investment. The research question investigates the concept of *Bildung* regarding this cohort of students. From previous research in the field presented in Chapter 2, studies addressing student experience, motivation, and transformation have tended to be qualitative (Norton & Toohey, 2011; Montgomery, 2010), and for the study at hand, I see no clear rationale to move away from this.

4.2.2 Narrative research

Narrative research as a research strategy focuses on using narrative to describe the world we live in and our experience of that world. Hinchman and Hinchman set out a helpful definition that can be applied to this thesis:

> "*Narrative (stories) in the human science should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and or people's experiences of it.*"

<div align="right">(1997: xvi)</div>

The above definition outlines some specific criteria and makes it flexible and malleable. It 'provisionally' gives room for the flow of the narrative to find form and function in its sequential nature and be meaningful in what it addresses. In addition to Hinchman and Hinchman (1997), Michael Murray describes the essence of narrative as 'underlin[ing] our very being and our way of acting in the world' (Murray, 2003:96). Murray's statement resonates in this study, exploring an academic sojourn for a master's programme as a transformative experience that is founded on the concept of *Bildung* for Chinese international master students, their being and becoming.

As a research strategy, narrative research focuses on a participant's 'lived experience' (Reissman, 1993: (iii)). This strategy fits in well with studies related to identity: "the telling of narratives is closely intertwined with the shaping and maintenance of personal identity. We tell stories about ourselves to others about our lives" (Murray, 2003:100). Through interviews, we tell stories; through these stories, we can track changes in our personhood and interpret meaningful insights into our inner self, our *being*, and imagine the *becoming* of who we are. In narrative research, researchers can interpret and analyse the participants' lives as told by the participants as they observe their own lived experiences (Elliot, 2005). Put succinctly by Gubrium:

"In a complex world of stories, it is useful to imagine that the little stories we hear day in and day out relate to bigger stories, some of which may be the big story of the experience in view, bringing on board issues of discourse, power, influence, and globalisation."

(2010: 390-391, emphasis in the original).

The plots, actors, and characters of the participants' lives are revealed through storytelling. This provides the opportunity for us to explore how participants relate to others and how others may influence them. Seeing this opens the door to working out how students are motivated and how they may express this motivation as investment as they plan and undertake their academic sojourn in the UK (Montgomery, 2010).

Elements included in the research design for this study were collaborative storytelling (Connelly and Clandinin,1990), discussed in further detail in Section 4.5.2, and the opportunity for the participants to refer to critical incidents they experienced (Schön, 1987) in Section 4.5.1. As evidenced in Chapter 6, approaching the research and analysis through narratives presents the differing and complicated ways we interact with our own lives. Through telling the various experiences, we can see how the story unfolds for each participant. In addition, we can see how the participants' motivations for studying and how the experience of studying at a UK higher education institution varied. This variation, in many ways, validates the need for in-depth qualitative studies, providing the opportunity to delve into participants' lives and giving a voice to the complexity and variance of the human story.

4.2.3 Case study

I followed a case study design to explore the participants' lives and experiences in this study. Through exploratory analysis in a case study, we can look at the subjective experience of a particular group of people and find insight from what they tell us (Bryman, 2012; Silverman, 2011). This study centres on each participant as an individual case, exploring the participants' interpretation of their

choices, motivations, emotions, and experiences while addressing their year studying overseas as a transformative period in their life. Case study research provides flexibility, allowing the researcher to make research decisions and choices based on the case before them (Yin, 1994). Based on its participants' subjectivities, this exploratory study does not intend to represent the whole population of Chinese international master's students but offers insight into the subjective experience of some (Silverman, 2011).

A core tenet of this study is to explore the concept of *Bildung* and to develop a strand of theory named *'being and becoming'* to demonstrate how undertaking a master's in the UK is a transformative experience for Chinese international students. It is apt for this study's data collection to follow the participants through their academic sojourn with multiple interviews; it is longitudinal, following a trajectory of time and experience (Montgomery, 2010).

4.2.4 Pilot study

I piloted this research design with a Chinese student studying for a master's degree. I recruited my pilot participant through a Chinese student society at the research institution. This student studied at an International Study Centre for a foundation year, undertook an undergraduate programme, and was studying for a master's degree in the UK. I had initially hoped to recruit for my pilot a student who had completed their master's degree. However, it was the beginning of December 2018, and most students who had completed their studies had already returned home. The pilot was a valuable experience for me and shone a light on aspects of the Chinese international student experience I had not thought about before. The pilot interview brought up many points for discussion. The pilot participant also addressed aspects of their experience of studying a foundation year and an undergraduate degree. They compared students who completed undergraduate courses in the UK, completed pre-sessional and pre-master's programmes, and students who received unconditional offers.

The primary aim of the pilot interview was to assess the methods for data collection, trial my interview style, and determine if I needed to alter the intended

methods for data and data analysis. The pilot interview lasted 90 minutes and covered questions going through the student's experience in the UK to date. The pilot participant brought forth stories from their experience in the UK, their educational background, motivations, and reasons for studying in the UK, looking forward to the future, and their family's influences on them and their choices. The pilot interview confirmed that interviews were an appropriate method of data collection for this project. Additionally, it gave credence to including reported personal experiences that would support the interview process and provide an additional layer to the data collected.

4.3 Interview participants

I chose a sample size of five participants to present the variance of accounts and stories, as no two people's experience is the same. However, rather than selecting multiple participants for generalisability, the intention was to present a collection of accounts. As discussed in Section 4.2.3, selecting five participants to tell their stories as individual case studies supports exploring the participants' varying experiences as international students in the UK. In addition, by having multiple interview participants discuss the process of becoming, we can see the 'being and becoming' trajectory more clearly across a collection of student journeys.

This research is specific to a particular cohort of students. As such, I requested conversation participants who have chosen to study abroad for a master's in the UK, as related to the research questions (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). I chose purposive sampling to obtain a group of participants that fit the criteria (Kvale and Brinkman, 2015): mainland Chinese international students studying for a master's in the UK. I asked for students who had not completed an undergraduate degree in the UK. I included this criterion because if students had studied for their undergraduate degree in the UK, that would be a different student sample. I did not put any gender profile on the recruitment poster and offered an incentive of a £20 Amazon voucher for each interview.

To recruit participants, I put up posters around the campus at points where I felt interaction among Chinese students would occur, such as the reception and café area of schools with a high representation of Chinese students, the language centre, and corridors of various departments. After receiving approval from the ethics committee at the research institution, I began the recruitment process; it was just before the winter break, and many students had left campus. To proceed a little faster after Christmas, I decided on a more direct tactic to recruit participants as I had not yet received any interest from my posters. I contacted my pilot participant and asked them to share the poster with other Chinese students through the Chinese Students and Scholars Association. This approach proved much more fruitful, and I had responses almost immediately.

Similarly, I asked each participant to share the poster with others, snowballing it. Not all the students who contacted me were participants in the research interviews; several people contacted me and then did not respond after that, which is also expected. In addition to the participants who volunteered through snowball sampling, I started to receive interest from my posters. One participant volunteered through that route. I acknowledge that using snowball sampling could be a limitation, possibly having participants who feel the same or have a similar personality type (Bryman, 2012); however, this did not occur. The participants had differing levels of engagement and interaction with their studies and UK experience. Moreover, two participants who could be described as positive and proactive in their engagement with university life and their studies volunteered through two different recruitment methods, one through the poster and one through snowball sampling.

It happened that all the participants who volunteered to take part in the research were female. I saw this as an organic process of undertaking research. I had no sex-specific objectives in the research questions and design; however, I did contemplate taking an angle of the research that had the female sex playing a more active role. All the participants being female meant there was the potential to work with other theories that might focus on sex and gender, such as feminist or gender theory. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, I decided not to follow that path as the participants did not refer to their sex or gender as contributing to their experience in the UK. To understand the gender perspective, a conversation focusing on gender identity with the participants would be required; during the interviews, this discussion did not happen, so it would not be prudent of me to make any assumptions when analysing the data. Reflecting on the statement from Lomer (2017) referred to in Section 2.1.2, p. 40, I considered the aspects of identity that the participants referred to, such as their prior education, family and social background and familial expectations. From the interviews with the participants, these aspects of identity had an impact on their experiences in the UK and how they saw their present self and imagined future self. Furthermore, any impact on their future lives regarding their gender identity as women would require a longitudinal study, which would be a consideration for future research outlined in Chapter 9.

Name	Age	Masters degree
Annie	23	Human Resource Management
Mai	34	Intellectual Property Law
Akira	30	International Commercial Law
Yiwen	23	International Marketing
Li	23	Human Resource Management

Figure 4b Interview participants

4.4 Data collection

To access the stories and narratives of the participants, I used responsive interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Rubin and Rubin (2005) posit that responsive interviewing stems from the philosophical premise of interpretive constructivism in which we as researchers bring together participants' interpretations of their lives and experiences. Responsive interviewing is a particular style that acknowledges the interviewer and interviewee as conversational partners taking part in a mutual exchange. I chose responsive interviewing to elicit responses as it focuses on the participant and their experiences, providing rich descriptive accounts. The interview is flexible, whether open or semi-structured, to allow the interviewer to hear the words the interviewee says and ask questions that delve more deeply based on the personal and individual experience of the interviewee.

I chose responsive interviewing through semi-structured interviews[3] as the core method for data collection. I can listen to their stories and uncover their motivations and emotions, the challenges they may face, and their experiences of studying at a UK higher education institution. Interviews proved to be the most suitable choice as each of the above has multiple facets. I wanted to probe the participants further on their responses to understand what was happening or what might be going on for these students. The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed a more free-flow conversation to develop while also discussing specific topics and asking specific questions related to the participant's experiences.

Additionally, the participants spoke English as an additional language, and often follow-on questions were required to obtain a more descriptive picture of who they were. For example, in the first interview, I asked 'Tell me about yourself'; for most participants, this resulted in a short description stating their age, that they come from China and what they were studying. This description opened the first conversation and allowed me to ask follow-on questions about their

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[3] See Appendix 3 p. 219 for a draft of the interview schedule.

hometown, educational background, and family. The follow-on questions I asked were in response to the answer given by individual participants; I encouraged the participants to lead the interview where possible, giving them time and space to talk about what was important or of note to them.

As a researcher and interviewer with a research project that I am highly invested in, I wanted to build rapport with my participants, creating connections with them through their responses. I felt that the meaning-making with the data was much more mutual using responsive interviewing. I cannot have this data without the participant sitting across from me. By taking this approach, I found that the participants provided a vibrant portrait of themselves and felt comfortable talking about their lives, thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Responsive interviewing follows the premise that it is not just the interviewee that gives in this conversation exchange, but the interviewer gives something back to the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). For the interviews in this study, giving back was a space and a listening ear to the participants' stories.

As the other conversation partner in the exchange, I offered my accounts, experiences, and thoughts on the discussed topics. When the participants discussed the challenges they encountered, we came together to think of strategies that may help them overcome those challenges. This happened on three occasions. Akira was struggling with how and when to ask for assistance from her academic advisors; for this, I discussed the role of the academic advisor and that they were in post to guide their academic studies. When Li asked about the attendance policy and what might happen if they were not engaging with one of their modules, I discussed the attendance policy of the research institution and how they would be contacted if their attendance was not meeting the requirements as per UKVI compliance conditions. The third occasion was when Yiwen described an incident while studying at another university and her friend becoming a target of a financial scam. Yiwen played an active role in liaising with her friend's family and authorities, so we discussed the support services in place to support students when going through challenging times that may affect their studies. These are examples of how the position of insider researcher was a challenge and where I made an ethical decision to provide guidance and support as per my professional role during the interviews. This was an example

of the decision-making of insider researchers described by Sikes (2006) and Ross (2017) and where I felt I was making an ethical choice to do what I perceived as being 'good' in the moral sense and what seemed appropriate.

In addition, I asked each participant to record critical moments or incidents they experienced during the data collection period. When discussing this with the participants in the first interview, I described a critical moment or incident as a time when they felt a 'eureka' moment, when they felt different or thought differently about something or had a sense of realisation. I suggested they could record this by any method they wished, whether a written diary entry, image or photo, or voice recording, and we would discuss this in the second interview.

Included in the data collection was a third-person narrative of the interview (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). After each interview, I sent the third-person narrative to the participants and asked them to read and check that it was an accurate account of our conversation (Sikes, 2010). It was important to me that each participant felt I had reported their experiences accurately. In the area of narrative research, one argument analyses the data using both narrative analysis and analysis of a narrative (Mischler, 1991). This an appealing approach; however, it lacks the respondent validity that I wanted to include as the interviews took place in English, which was an additional language for the participants of the study. As such I determined that the use of collaborative accounts and a third-person story would be an appropriate approach and one that is prevalent in studies of education where voice is of paramount importance (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). The third-person accounts and their inclusion in the data provide an additional aspect of the participant voice in the data and the research. The topic of collaborative stories is discussed further in Section 4.5.2.

Interviewing is a personal process for both the interviewer and interviewee and can be intense for both parties. Respect is given to the participants for the time they have given up and for allowing someone to enter their lives and ask them personal questions. It can be a form of intrusion, which needs to be discussed and approached delicately and kindly.

4.4.1 Interview one

Where possible, each participant gave three interviews; the schedule for the first interview was in January and February 2019. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and took place on campus. The interviews were recorded on my smartphone using a voice recording app that records the audio as an mp4 file. I then uploaded these files to my personal password-protected computer. The audio files are named in code and then uploaded onto a transcription software platform, Trint. This software platform does an initial transcription, after which I re-transcribed the transcript. On completing the transcription, I did an initial round of coding and wrote a third-person story; I sent this story to the participant and asked if they felt it was an accurate account of what was said and if they would like to add or change anything. The data collection process was, from the very beginning, a mutual interaction, and receiving input from the participants at this stage was a valuable way to maintain their connection with the data. Additionally, it provided a validity check that my interpretation of our conversation was accurate concerning how they experienced it.

4.4.2 Interview two

The second interview followed a similar pattern to the first. The interviews took place in June 2019, after the participants completed their final exams and began working on their dissertations. All interviews except one took place on campus in a seminar room I booked. One interview took place off-campus as this was more convenient for the participant. The interviews were again recorded on my smartphone and initially transcribed via the transcription software Trint, after which I re-transcribed them. After the initial coding, I wrote the third-person story and sent it to the participants to confirm my interpretation. A central aspect of the second interview was a conversation about critical incidents they had experienced. The participants presented these incidents through various modes, as seen in Section 4.5.1, Figure 4.

4.4.3 Interview three

The third and final interview was scheduled to take place in October. Two participants, Akira and Mai, were in the UK, Yiwen was travelling with family, and Annie and Li had returned to China. I interviewed Akira and Mai as planned, similar to the previous two interviews, though they took place off-campus. Yiwen had declared interest in continuing after she had returned to China from travelling with her family. However, Yiwen's contact information and university email address were deactivated while travelling, and our communication ended. Annie and Li, whom I was in contact with when they returned to China, said they could not participate in a final interview because they were applying for jobs and had very little time. Li sent an email account of her experiences studying in the UK and a brief reflective statement.

I decided I could forgo the third interview with the remaining participants, for two reasons. First, the coronavirus pandemic was beginning to unfold in Wuhan, China. As the year ended and 2020 began, I did not feel it was appropriate to follow up while areas in China were beginning to go into lockdown, and the situation was quite uncertain. Second, I took the above into account and assessed the transcripts of Mai and Akira's second and third interviews. The content of Mai and Akira's third interviews supported the narratives from the second interview but did not provide any additional data that altered the findings. I was confident that the data I had collected were sufficient to meet the needs of the research project and so proceeded without a third interview with Yiwen, Li and Annie.

I undertook the third interview with Akira and Mai; the interviews were recorded, transcribed via Trint and then re-transcribed, like the first and second interviews. I again initially coded the transcripts and sent Akira and Mai the third-person story. As a closing loop, Mai wrote a reflective statement about taking part in the research project.

4.4.4 Transcription and data storage

I downloaded the audio for each interview recorded and uploaded it to Trint.com, a software platform for transcription. After Trint transcribed the interviews, I re-transcribed the interviews to uphold a close relationship with the emotions and feelings expressed during the conversation. Subtle elements of a conversation may not be detected if a third party transcribes the interview. I feel very connected to the conversations I had with my participants and that I had to interpret and report the words the participants say in the most accurate way possible. Also, the participants in this research project speak English as an additional language, and the software could not maintain 100% accuracy with what was said. By re-transcribing, I was able to make the appropriate edits where necessary. The data for this project are stored on a password-protected personal computer, the data are encrypted, and participants are pseudonymised. No data were held on the transcription software but transferred to NVivo and deleted from the transcription platform. I will store the data for this project for the time required by University College London Data Protection requirements. Further details on transcription and data storage are discussed in Chapter 5.

4.5 Narrative analysis

In this thesis, I take the perspective from narrative research that we tell stories when we talk about ourselves. The approach of responsive interviewing is to dig deeper into the accounts we are told. Within narrative research, there can be a predilection to use a form of analysis that focuses on stories as the method of data analysis, of which there are two standard streams (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative analysis accounts for 'events, actions, and happenings' (Polkinghorne, 1995:7) as the individual experiences them. This form of analysis is distinct from the analysis of a narrative, where the transcript itself is viewed as a narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995). I chose narrative analysis as the method of data analysis as I deemed it best with semi-structured responsive interviewing and emergent collaborative stories.

Interviews
Transcribed via Trint
Retranscribed manually, editing initial transcription

Coding
Inital coding for emergent themes, dominant quotes, agency and actors

Collaborative story
Analysis of codes and transcripts for construction of third person story, confirmed by the participants

Themes in the framework of Bildung as 'being and becoming'
Alignment of codes as emergent themes with the collaborative story in the framework of 'being and becoming'

Co-constructed narratives
Highlight the voice of the participants through the collaborative story, applying the co-constructed narrative to the research question

Figure 4c Process of analysis

I initially coded the transcript for emergent themes that I used to get a sense of the data and to analyse and synthesise the data across the participants and the literature[4]. Also, initially coding the transcripts in such a way allowed me to identify dominant quotes that I could easily categorise and store in NVivo. I wanted to analyse by hand to feel close to the data; using NVivo to record the data and analysis was an efficient method to categorise and search for specific items as the process continued.

After the initial coding, I rewrote the transcript as a third-person narrative; this allowed me to draw on each account's actors, plot, and context (Reissman, 1997; Elliot, 2005). This interaction with the data from the initial to the final interview supports Rubin and Rubin's (2005) assessment of analysing and working with the data collected through responsive interviewing. Rubin and Rubin (2005) posit that interviewing is much more than an exchange of questions and answers. This interviewing perspective follows Mishler's premise that the 'general assumption of narrative analysis [is] that telling stories is one of the significant ways individuals construct and express meaning' (Mishler,1991: 67).

4.5.1 Critical incidents

For the second interview, I asked participants to think about and prepare moments they felt were critical incidents in their lives while studying in the UK. Critical incidents can be defined as moments or events critical for what they mean to the individual (Eraut, 1994). They could be events that have tension or everyday moments (ibid). How the individual interprets these moments and events and reflects on them is a measure of their criticality. Taking this into account, when I asked the participants to describe a critical incident or moment, I left it open to the individual whether the moment was related to their educational and academic experiences or to their life experiences of living in the UK.

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[4] Please see Appendix 4: Sample of Codes p. 222.

Similarly, I did not define a structure of how they should record this moment. The participants could record the moment in whatever way they felt comfortable, whether written, audio, video, or pictures. This approach provided cohesion with the philosophical social constructivist perspective and the responsive interviewing of this research project. The participants are at the centre of the research and guide the study, reiterating the process as a mutual exchange, that the participant's voice is present in the transcript of the interviews, and their agency in choosing how they wish to express their voice.

In the literature, critical incidents have been used in studies of education and professional practice in teaching (Eraut, 1994). Critical incidents have been presented as a research method for how international students engage with their seminars and lectures (Gu, 2009; Volet & Jones, 2012; Spencer-Oatey, 2013). From these studies, I deemed critical incidents an opportunity for Chinese international students to describe their experiences. I was providing the space for a discussion on critical events where the participants could determine what impact these different events may have had on them.

Participant	Mode	Life/Academic	Incident
Akira	Told a story	Life	Credit card details being stolen and having to get a part-time job to earn money
Anne	Pictures	Life	Exploring different restaurants and food, going to the cinema to watch a film in English
Li	Video	Life	Interviewing different people about their thoughts and experiences of Chinese people
Mai	PowerPoint slides/pictures	Life/Academic	Going skydiving and winning a prize with her classmates for a presentation on British culture and the university
Yiwen	Told a story	Life	Having to help when an acquaintance was the victim of a fraudulent money scam

Figure 4d Critical incidents

4.5.2 Collaborative stories

Narrative research and inquiry focus on the presentation of experience through storytelling. I approached the data collection through responsive interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) and viewed the interview as a collaborative story (Connelly & Clandinin,1990). Considering this, I wrote a third-person account after transcribing the interview to demonstrate how I interpreted and retold the participant's story. I then asked the participant to read this account. It offered them the opportunity to voice whether this was an accurate description, reflect on their own storied experience, and add to the interpretation of meaning[5]. This method embodies the perspective of social constructionism and qualitative research, the mutual exchange between researcher and participants. This form of research is common in studies of education (Connelly & Clandinin,1990) and health (Green, 2013; Wang and Geale, 2015), where the research questions focus on events or experiences of the individual (Connelly & Clandinin,1990). The collaborative account has two primary functions: Firstly, it reveals the storied account from the interview transcripts, amplifying the voice of the participants (Bishop, 1997). Secondly, the collaborative story checked by the participant gives strength to the methodology of this study as respondent validation (Sikes, 2010). It provides a space and opportunity for the participant to agree whether my interpretation of the interview was a true and accurate account. Through the interaction, various actors in the participants' lives are revealed, and the participants have the space to discuss what is important to them in their life. An important caveat to include is that the objective of the research is not to generalise or make statements about how one may understand a specific population. The objective is to offer insights that can open our understanding of how life events or experiences may be felt or understood.

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[5] For an example, see Appendix 6, p. 234.

4.5.3 Analysis in the framework of *Bildung* as 'being and becoming'

The collaborative stories are grounded in the philosophical foundations of this study. To provide a strong theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming,' I took the codes that emerged from the transcripts and, together with the collaborative stories, aligned these codes as themes into the framework below, Figure 4e.
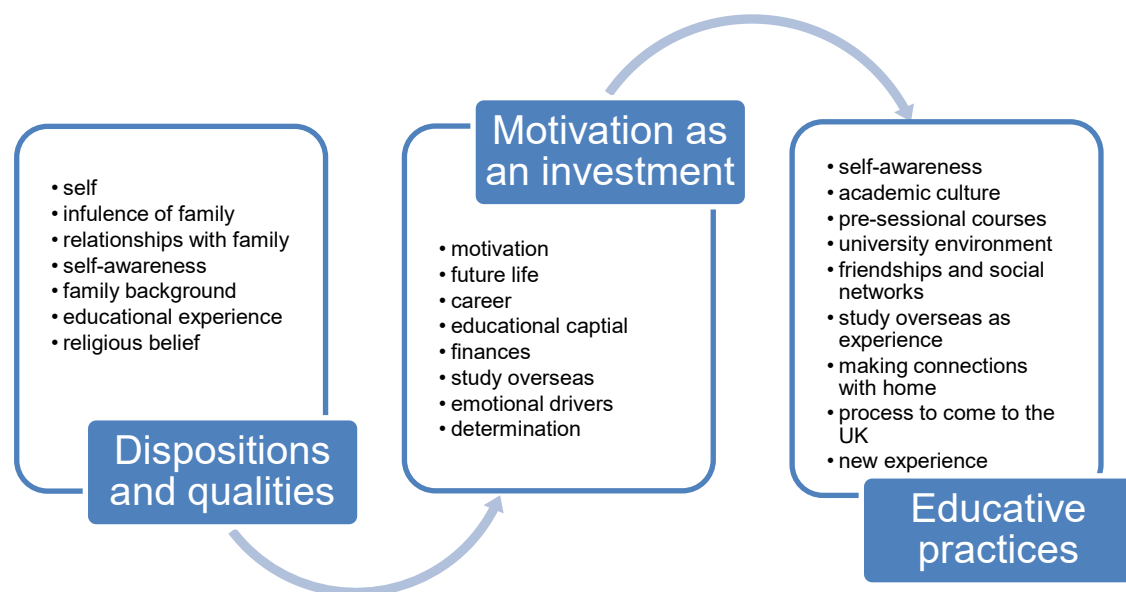
Figure 4e Themes in the framework of *Bildung* as 'being and becoming'

The framework and codes outlined here and the findings discussed in Chapter 6 bring together this story of 'being and becoming,' which is discussed concerning the research question for this study and the development of a strand of theory to explore the lived experiences of Chinese international students studying in UK higher education.

4.6 Trustworthiness, accuracy, transparency

Presenting a credibility check for qualitative research requires an alternative set of criteria to quantitative work, where validity and reliability are assessed (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). In this thesis, I approach credibility as trustworthiness, accuracy, and transparency (ibid).

4.6.1 Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this research comes from my training and experience in undertaking research and my professionalism working at a higher education institution with international students' welfare and pastoral care. I am experienced in the area of Chinese international master's students, exploring their motivations for studying in the UK and the challenges they face. I am committed to the research I am undertaking and to how it is accurately reported. I demonstrate this in the ethical considerations presented in Chapter 5. In addition, asking the participants to read through the third-person story, which was my interpretation of their narrative, maintained their voice and perspective. The participants had the opportunity to read and agree or disagree with my understanding of what they told me. If they wished to make changes or felt I had misinterpreted any part of our conversation, they could do so.

4.6.2 Accuracy

A core objective of this research is to present the accounts of individuals; this study does not intend to generalise across the Chinese international master's student population or be representative of a whole cohort of students (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). It intends to provide insight and increase an understanding of members of this community through individual accounts, as demonstrated by the case study approach (Yin, 1994). The impact and importance (Yardley, 2000) of this research is to take these accounts to a broader audience and disseminate them as part of my work as a Student Engagement Officer

(International). In addition, and as part of disseminating this research to the broader higher education sector, I aim to take forward and implement practices that add and contribute positively to the transition of Chinese international master's students. As described above, the opportunity for the participants to agree or disagree with my account of our interview demonstrates the accuracy of what has been recorded. This study's research design and strategy can be replicated; however, how each participant responds to the questions asked is individual. Participants may have similar experiences, but how these experiences are felt, described, and enacted will differ based on our nature as human beings.

4.6.3 Transparency

In writing this thesis, I intend to be as transparent and coherent as possible, reflecting on the methods chosen and giving an accurate and truthful account of what was done at every step. In addition to this, other research methods and approaches are considered, in the end, selecting those that are the best fit and most appropriate to collect and analyse the data answering the research question. In this chapter, I have outlined and demonstrated the rationale and thought process to meet the above criteria.

Chapter 5 Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations in undertaking a research project are vital and a central cog within the methodology used. This doctoral thesis is based on retelling stories involving human participants and their experiences; therefore, I considered the ethics of what and how I researched. While planning and carrying out the data collection, I encountered challenges and issues. Some were difficult but none were insurmountable. This chapter discusses the ethical considerations and how I handled each throughout this thesis's planning, data collection, and writing.

This study follows the ethical guidelines and procedures set out by the University College London Institute of Education. In addition to those guidelines, I consulted the Economic and Social Research Council Ethics Research Ethics and the British Education Research Association. I followed the process for obtaining ethical approval from UCL and the Department of Culture Communication and Media at UCL Institute of Education. I undertook this research at an institution external to the UCL Institute of Education. I followed due process, submitted my ethical review form to the UCL Institution of Education, and received my data protection number and approval from my department. I then presented this to the Ethics Review Committee at the research institution, which accepted the ethical approval from UCL and granted me permission to recruit participants and undertake the research.

In the information sheet and consent form,[6] I outlined that in taking part in this research, the participants would do so voluntarily, and the principles of **volunteerism and the right to withdraw** would be upheld**.** No student had to take part, and if, during the research project, they no longer wished to take part, they could withdraw at any time.

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[6] Appendix 1, pp. 194-217.

The participants provided **informed consent** and agreed to take part in the research study. Participants were sent the information sheet and consent form. After discussing these at our first meeting, they signed before we began the interview. In this preliminary discussion, I went through the project, what it would entail, and how I would disseminate the research. I scanned the consent form, filed it on a password-protected personal computer and encrypted it. The original consent form was destroyed in confidential waste at the research institution.

As outlined in the consent form and information sheet, I prioritised keeping the data from the project **confidential** and providing **anonymity** to the participants. The identity of the participants is kept pseudonymous; however, identifying characteristics such as age, gender, nationality, and hometown are included in this thesis. I asked the participants if they would like to choose their pseudonyms. One participant chose her pseudonym; all others allowed me to choose theirs. After the first interview, when I sent through the interpretive stories from our interviews, I asked if the participants were happy with their pseudonyms, and all said yes.

Disclosures/ limits to confidentiality: In the information sheet, I outlined the limitations to confidentiality and disclosures I would be obliged to make to the institution if I deemed necessary. If I believed that a participant was in some way at risk of harm to themselves or others, I would be responsible for following the research institution's procedures for students at risk of harm. Additionally, if a participant disclosed any Tier 4 visa status breaches, I would have needed to inform the Home Office through the institution's UKVI Compliance Officer.

This thesis is bound to the data collected from human participants; I am therefore responsible for ensuring **no harm to the participants** in undertaking said research. I am aware of the psychological impact of taking part. Students may discuss sensitivities regarding the topic, such as homesickness, loneliness, self-esteem, and financial hardship. I made available information on the well-being and support services provided by the higher education institution. Throughout the interview, when the participants referred to difficulties they were experiencing or had experienced, I directed them to the specific services and facilities at the university with which they could engage. When I provided relevant advice, I

considered this as a space these participants were engaging with and offered my knowledge as a professional. I used judgment in these situations about what was appropriate, considering my position at the time as international student support assistant and my role as a researcher. When participants tell you their stories, an exchange takes place, and I wanted to reciprocate in that exchange. I found this approach added a sense of freedom and fluidity to the interviews; it facilitated building a more in-depth relationship between myself and the participants. It gave the participants the space to highlight experiences relevant to them and provided additional data that I could follow up on in further questioning or the following interview. The above was confirmed in the case of Akira: When we discussed the difficulties she was facing, I was able to guide her towards the services she may wish to seek out. I did so in the same manner as I would in my role as international student support assistant. In the following interview, Akira thanked me for the advice and said she had done what we discussed with positive results. She outlined that she had not felt confident that she could do that before, and it had improved many aspects of her studying life.

An aspect relevant to this study is **insider research**; I am an employee at the institution where I undertook this research project. I needed to consider the power dynamics and implications of how my position may influence the research throughout the project's duration. When undertaking data collection, I worked in the International Student Support Office and had access to students' records. I followed due diligence and kept the research data separate from my everyday work, and I will continue to do so. Part of the international student support assistant role was to staff a front desk reception where international students often ask questions regarding welfare and support. I discussed with the participants that any visit they made to the International Student Support Office would not impact my research data or vice versa. Similarly, taking part in my research would not affect the service they received.

Research at an external institution to UCL: I undertook this research at a higher education institution external to UCL. I contacted the Research Committee for this institution. I was instructed on completion of my ethics review (submitted to and granted by UCL) to present this ethics review form to the Research Committee.

Recruitment: Participants were recruited at a higher education institution external to UCL. I received permission from the Research Committee of the research institution to invite participants to take part in the study. I chose to target the Chinese student community through posters and snowball sampling.

Data storage and protection: Data are stored and used through NVivo Qualitative Software on a fingerprint-protected personal computer to which no others have access. Files on the same password-protected computer are encrypted using AES Crypt. The encrypted data will be stored at the end of this research plus ten years, as mentioned in UCL's Records Retention Schedule.

Throughout the research process, I ensured **sensitivity to the participants**. The participants are speakers of English as an additional language. I approached the interviews with patience and sensitivity, considering the participants may have difficulty expressing themselves and may wish to use a translating device such as Google Translate, bring a dictionary, or use pen and paper.

No impact on academic records: There was no academic benefit from taking part in the study regarding the students' grades, nor was it noted on their academic record that they took part in the study. However, the study involved a reflective process that may affect their motivation and perceptions of their academic performance.

Use of an incentive; Due to this research project's nature and longitudinal process, which involved participants taking part in multiple interviews throughout their master's programme, I decided an incentive would be appropriate. I gave each participant a £20 Amazon voucher per interview and provided tea, coffee and other refreshments as requested during the interview. For the final interview, I could only offer the incentive to two participants, Akira and Mai, who were still in the UK and took part in in-person interviews. I intended to provide the equivalent for Yiwen, Li, and Annie; however, they received the incentive for the two interviews they took part in as the third interview did not occur.

Responsibility to the researcher: In undertaking this research, I have ensured that the data are collected in a safe space and that no harm will occur. If I am told information that I find inappropriate, I will ensure that the procedural channels are followed as outlined by the policies and procedures of the research institution. During this research project and thesis writing, I kept a research diary to record the rationale for my decisions and my thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Responsibility to the institution: The research will not be used as a performance tool for the higher education institution. I have anonymised the higher education institution in the study, and the only identifying characteristic is its location on the southeast coast of the UK.

Responsibility to the academic community: This project has been undertaken with transparency and rigour concerning the participants, the researcher, and the research institution.

Location: The location of each interview was at a time and place convenient to the participant. I offered suggestions such as a classroom or quiet space on campus. All first interviews took place on campus. One of the second interviews took place off-campus at a convenient location for the participant. The third interview with Mai and Akira took place off-campus. As mentioned in Section 4.4.3, p. 88, three participants could not participate in a third interview because they had returned to China.

Reporting, dissemination, and use of findings: The findings from this research study are reported as the fulfilment of the EdD. I will also disseminate the findings to colleagues at the research institution. As my job role at the research institution changed while writing this thesis, I will use the findings from this research in my role as Student Engagement Officer (International). I will use the outcomes of this study to look at how we capture student voices, map student journeys, and develop training for staff and students on intercultural awareness. There may be scope and possibility to use the insights from this study to create an online module that may aid students in transitioning to UK academic culture.

The above has outlined the ethical considerations and implications for the research undertaken for this thesis. I have given due consideration to aspects specific to the study, such as insider research, incentives, and any potential harm or implications for the participants.

Chapter 6 Narrative Stories Through Case Studies

When thinking about the different components of a thesis, it is helpful to consider the metaphor of a tree, with the methodology as the trunk and the literature and conceptual framework as the roots. To take the image further, each participant and their findings are the branches and leaves. As such, they represent a fertile and fascinating area of research. In this chapter, I present the stories of the five participants: Akira, Annie, Li, Mai, and Yiwen. Following a case study design in which each participant is a case, each is handled slightly differently based on the individual and their varying communication patterns and capabilities. I have separated each case into sections on background, choosing the UK, studying in the UK, and reflections on studies and life in the UK. These sub-headings not only describe the experiences the participants discussed but also assist in outlining their respective student journey trajectories via their thoughts and feelings.

Through each case story and the narratives as told by the participants, we can see the actors and characters who have a presence in their lives. Similarly, we can see the major and minor plots of what is happening to them as they make their journey through their master's programme. It is interesting to see the significance of their studies, how relationships with friends, dating partners, or future partnerships feature, and the subtle social commentary each participant provides while discussing their life and future plans.

Chapters 7 and 8 then address the research question and objectives and how the case studies below answer that question and develop a theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming' for the Chinese international master's student.

6.1 Akira

Background

Akira was a 30-year-old student from Yantai in the province of Shandong in China. Until coming to the UK, she had lived her whole life in Yantai. She was studying for a master's degree in international commercial and trade law. Akira was the only child in her family; her grandparents had died, so it was just her and her parents, and they lived together. Akira talked about her undergraduate studying experience in Yantai as being a *"beautiful memory"* (Interview One). Akira studied law and policy as her undergraduate degree. When Akira chose her undergraduate major, she was influenced by events in her family and a legal situation that caused her and her family to lose money. Akira mentioned that she wanted to go somewhere else that was not in her hometown, but her choice was limited because of her high school grades. She got a job in a human resource recruitment company when she finished her undergraduate course. She describes the job as not particularly challenging, and she left the position after two years. At that point, she had already decided she wanted to study further and take this opportunity to study abroad.

When Akira decided she wanted to study in the UK, she had to talk with her parents. They disagreed with her and did not want her to study abroad. Nevertheless, they changed their minds after Akira pleaded with them. However, this did put extra pressure on her as her parents gave her the money to study in the UK.

> *"I told them that I want to do it and this is my last chance because if I didn't come here and I'm married, and I'm married with someone, and I will have a family I will have a lot of responsibility. I can't leave if I want to leave, I can't, even if I wanted to, I can't. So I, I told them to give me one year, please let me do something I want to do, and they said yes."*
>
> Interview One

Choosing the UK

Akira chose the UK because master's courses are only one year long, she is a little older, and she does not have enough money to study in the USA because she would need to spend more time there.

> *"So I decide (sic) to come to the UK because I need just one year… and another reason is that I come here I need to study English and English for me is a skill for the future… If I want to find work and if I come here I have some practice about English I have the special experience, and I will be more competitive about it"*.
>
> Interview One

Akira organised and planned which institutions she would like to apply to and chose five universities. The deciding factors for these universities were that they were close to London because she felt that London is safe and that more resources were available for jobs in London. Of the five universities, she rated four on their rank in the UK and their rank in law. She chose the remaining university because she could still go there without a high IELTS score.

> *"I am very afraid because I can't pass the exam and get the standard, so I chose that one as my last choice."*
>
> Interview One

She received a conditional offer from this university and attended a ten-week pre-sessional course before beginning her master's degree.

Studying in the UK

Akira had many Chinese friends at university, and her friendship group was mainly comprised of students she met on the pre-sessional course and friends of those friends. Most of her friends lived off-campus, but they met weekly and often had dinner together. They all studied different courses, so they could not help each other with their course work, but they helped each other with social

and personal needs, for example, medicine if someone were sick or a friend needed something.

Akira found communicating with her classmates very difficult, but if she had questions, she sent them to their WhatsApp group, and they helped her; she mentioned that her classmates were from other countries and were very nice.

> *"Because my course the students are all come from other countries, but they are very nice because if I have some questions, I can send them in the WhatsApp, and they are very kind to help me, but because of language and for me I am a little shy face to face because I always think my language is so poor and I can't understand what they said… Actually, when I know I will live in the campus I was very happy because I know I have more opportunities to communicate with foreigners and I know I will have more chance to practise English but actually when I meet my classmates we just say nothing. We just 'oh hi' 'hi' 'goodbye' and we seldom communicate. I want to communicate with them, but I don't know how to open the topic".*

> Interview One

In Akira's classes, they did not have many opportunities to take part in group projects. Akira thought that maybe because they did not do many group assignments, they did not have much time to get to know each other. Also, most of her classes were held in the evening, and they usually finished late; she and her classmates tended to go home afterwards. Akira compared her class with those of her friends; in her friends' classes, they did a lot of group work, spent much time talking and discussing their course, and often had dinner together. She thought it would be nice and she would like it if her class were like that too.

Akira enjoyed her course. The teaching style and system were very different from what she had experienced before. Even though she enjoyed it, she found it challenging.

> *"One reason is because I am a little shy and I'm very afraid that I ask that question and it's so stupid… I'm very afraid I will waste other students'*

time because it's not my own class and other students other local students will understand it. So if I asked those questions, it means I wasted their time, so I prefer to send email (sic) to ask the tutor."

<div align="right">Interview One</div>

In the second term, Akira found her classes were going well, much better than in the first term.

"Last time you told me I can do it, be more active to ask the tutor a lot of questions and the tutor is also very kind and reply to me very detailed… they always encourage me, and so I make time, I email them to ask for an appointment, and they said okay… it also give me a lot of confidence, and yes they told me that you are an international student and so if you can't ask like a local speaker that is okay you just do this, you just try your best to study".

<div align="right">Interview Two</div>

She was proud of herself that she had been able to do this. She was doing things she had never done before and felt very positive.

For her dissertation, Akira had to write a proposal. She felt she worked very hard on it but did not receive a very high grade; she was a little disappointed about that.

"I go to meet my advisor, and she is very kind, and she gives me a lot of advice, so I finish it, and I think I should get very high points, but I just pass it, so I am a little sad… before I have a lot of confidence about the dissertation but now I'm very worried about it, I'm not sure I can pass it, I'm very afraid I will fail it."

<div align="right">Interview Two</div>

She talked a lot to one of her friends about it; her friend told her that her advisor wanted her to work hard and have her own opinion and that she needed to read a lot. Akira was quite confused about writing her dissertation; she felt that she had her opinion and needed to find material to support her argument. However, her advisor told her she needed to find her opinion through the research process

and in the material. Akira found that this was a very different way of thinking than she had. She understood her advisor's advice; she thought now she should not focus on her own opinion and needed to have a lot more open thinking. Akira felt she has a good relationship with her dissertation advisor. Her dissertation supervisor was supportive and encouraging but did not tell Akira what to do and wanted Akira to explore her ideas. Akira thought this was very different from the education system in China.

> *"I think the difference is about the teaching system compared to my country, the difference the tutor is always to support you, to encourage you to do something you think is right and yes they'll just say we'll give you some help, but they also want … the most important thing is that you do it by yourself… they always give me a lot of confidence".*
>
> <div align="right">Interview Two</div>

Compared to her friends, Akira had more free time; her friends had many classes in the second term, so she rarely saw them. She found a part-time job at McDonald's. She searched online and found the job, and she was invited to an interview and passed it. She was amazed that she passed it and was proud of herself. She told her friends about it; some of them applied but did not get the interview, so she was shocked. Working at McDonald's gave Akira confidence, but she also felt conflicted about it.

> *"But sometimes I some confused because, how to say, I spent a lot of money to come to the UK my aim is to study, but now I go to the McDonald's to work. It's so strange, but I know if I didn't go to work I waste the time (sic) maybe I'm (sic) just stay at home. I told myself I should work. I should study but I seldom to study".*
>
> <div align="right">Interview Two</div>

Akira took a part-time job because of the extra time she felt she had and because her credit card details were stolen. Someone stole approximately £3,000 from her, an experience that was a critical incident. She needed money for her living costs and tuition fees, so she had to get a job. Her friends were supportive and told her that if she needed help, they would help her. She decided not to tell her

family about it because she felt she had to solve the problem herself. From this, she learned how to manage and deal with issues and solve stressful situations.

She also learned a lot from working at McDonald's and through it, work practices in another country. Most of her work colleagues were from the EU and they communicated with each other very freely. Akira was shy and did not feel confident speaking to them a lot, but they were kind and friendly to her and helped her at work if she needed it. She had access to online training courses through her work at McDonald's. She worked in customer care, so she felt this was also a good opportunity for her to learn a lot.

Reflections on studies and life in the UK

Before she came to study, Akira hoped to get good grades, but she was barely passing her modules. She had accepted more now about what she could do, and she felt that just passing was sufficient for her. However, she thought of herself as lazy and that she could and should do better for herself. Before her assignments were due, she procrastinated a lot, and then when the deadline approached, she felt that she should have done better and started working on her assignment earlier. However, she had not, and so had a constant feeling of regret that she should be doing more. She felt her main issue and area of improvement was time management. She tried to ask more questions in class but not that many, mainly because she was translating what was being said into Chinese while listening. She focused on the meaning of the words and did not always grasp the meaning of the content.

Akira found reading the most challenging aspect. She found it a struggle to read everything required for her classes. She needed to read articles and texts many times. Akira felt this was a big problem for her. It took her approximately two days to read one article; she planned how she would read an article and write notes. However, as it took her quite a long time, she never quite finished her plan. She collected a lot of the essential readings but never managed to get through them all. She asked her tutors for texts that might be easier for her, and they advised her on some supplementary readings, but as this was additional to

the essential readings, she could not read these either. Once she understood the articles, she found that the content was not challenging for her to understand after translating it into Chinese. She felt the problem was language and the amount of time it took to understand what the article meant in English.

> *"If I understand the page and I find all it's just to see some very easy thing, I mean translate to my own language it's so easy the big problem is before I understand it, it's just the English, it's so hard for me, so I still think the language is, yeah it's hard."*
>
> <div align="right">Interview Two</div>

Akira had attended classes at the academic writing centre; however, when she started those classes, she realised they were working with a different referencing system and felt it was not beneficial. The law school did provide a handbook about writing style and how to reference and do citations, but she found remembering it all quite challenging.

Akira planned to return to China and her hometown, and she hoped she could take the Chinese law exam and become a lawyer. She thought about finding a job in the UK, but she studied international law and did not know English law. She thought it would be tough for her to find a job in the UK. She planned to return to her hometown to take care of her parents. However, it would be hard to find a job because it is a small city without many big companies; she might not earn a big salary. She was an only child and felt that it was her responsibility to take care of her parents. She also thought that if she went to the bigger cities, she would have to spend more money living there than if she returned to her hometown. Her family gives her the most happiness, and after that, she wanted to live well: *"I think the family is the most important thing for me, and money is also important"* (Interview Three).

Akira and her friends often joked about the self-study style in the UK and that they spent so much money to come and study in the UK to study by themselves. However, this was just a joke; they felt they could do many more things in the UK through their studies. She thought this had been an exceptional experience; she could do many more things now than in China. Akira felt she had a different

way of thinking now and had learned a very different way to study and communicate.

> *"I must say that living in the UK for one year it has given me some special experience, if I didn't come here I would never practice that, so the first is how to manage my time. I never learned in my country. I didn't make a plan. Now I plan a week at a time, so I think it's very important for me."*
>
> Interview Three

Another aspect Akira mentioned she had learned about herself was that she had learned to control her moods. Sometimes she felt very lonely and uncomfortable and not confident, and she thought she was a failure, but she needed to control this and adjust her moods. Akira described herself as being happy and proud of herself, proud of her change in herself, and told herself she was the best.

The thing that surprised Akira the most about the UK was that she did not think there would be so many Chinese people. She was very worried before she came that she would not be able to communicate with anyone.

> *"Before I come here I'm very nervous that there will be no Chinese and my English is not very good and I can't communicate with the foreigners (sic). And I am also nervous about my house where I live and who I live with if I can keep a good relationship with them…. Now I think everything is easy… I can do everything I'm not very afraid about or worried about that… now I think I can speak a lot of English now I can express my meaning use the body language or use keywords [and] I know how to settle the emergency solve the problem yeah I think I learn a lot from here".*
>
> Interview Three

Akira described herself as patient, friendly, nice, and kind but not confident. Akira felt that she had changed a lot since being in the UK; she thought she had changed daily. Akira felt she knew how to adjust to her situation and change some of her habits if necessary. She would not rely so much on her parents to solve her problems but could settle the issues herself; she thought this had been

the most significant change. She also knew now how to communicate with different people. She described herself as sociable, friendly, honest, and helpful. She enjoyed helping others, and if she could, she tried to help her friends and those around her. However, she also did this because she did not like conflict and found that helping others was a way to prevent them from having conflicts with her.

> *"I think I changed every day here. Yes, I think my thinking, it also changed a lot… I know I think some maybe the biggest change is that when I meet the difficult (sic), I would first I think is not to tell my parents to let them settle the problem, it is I who want to settle it by myself maybe this is the biggest change."*

<div align="right">Interview Three</div>

6.2 Annie

Background

Annie was a 23-year female student from Jiangsu Province in China. Annie grew up in Taizhou, where she went to elementary, middle, and high school; her parents still lived there. Annie went to university in China for her undergraduate degree in human resource management. She initially applied to the university to study accountancy. However, she did not receive sufficient grades in her entrance exam, so the university offered her a place in human resource management. Annie's father influenced her to apply for accountancy. If Annie had had her own choice, she would have chosen architecture. She was deeply interested in architecture, buildings, and how humans interact with space. On reflection, she was happy that she was studying for a master's in human resource management as she had developed an interest in it.

Annie went to the USA during her undergraduate degree, intending to study there for two years. Unfortunately, she was in a car accident there, so she returned to China to complete her studies. Annie was only in the USA for three months; she enjoyed the experience. It took Annie about two months to overcome her car accident; she felt that it was a challenge she *"should experience in her life"* and that this was a *"gift"* from God to help her become braver than before (Interview One). She was comfortable during her time in the USA; she lived in an apartment with four other students, two American and two Chinese. She felt it was a good environment to communicate with the American students.

Annie was the only child in her family; her parents supported her financially to study in the UK. She felt that she must try to do her best in everything because of this; she *"cannot lose any time"* (Interview One). She must, at all times, try to improve herself. She wanted to be able to repay this loan to her parents, more than just giving back the money, but also spending time with them. She sometimes felt homesick, and she described herself as a person who thought they could do everything themselves. When she thought she was not doing well,

she felt homesick and wanted to see her family. She had no plans to return to China to visit them during her postgraduate studies; her parents did not want her to return during this time, as they thought it would be a waste. They also thought Annie should travel and use that time to see other places. Her parents supported her emotionally in studying in the UK. They thought it was a good idea because the university she attended in China was not as good as other universities that their friends' children attended. Furthermore, it was only for one year, and Annie could learn much during this time.

Choosing the UK

She decided to come to the UK to study for a postgraduate degree in the third year of her undergraduate degree. She used an education agent to help her prepare to come to the UK; they helped outline what score she needed on the IELTS and what grades she required from her undergraduate degree. She had five choices of university in the UK, all near London. She chose this university because it was the best one of the five. She received offers from three others and was refused by one. She researched the universities online to find out more about them and their facilities. One of the reasons she refused the other universities was that she did not like the architecture of the buildings; she enjoyed a combination of historical and modern buildings. The other universities had only historical buildings.

Annie always wanted to study in the UK. If her university in China had partnered with a UK university, she would have chosen to study abroad in the UK during her undergraduate degree. When Annie was younger, she enjoyed watching films from the UK and liked British pronunciation. Annie had another reason to choose the UK: she found that in the USA, people were very enthusiastic and what she describes as a bit too close. She was a person who liked boundaries, and she felt much more comfortable in the UK. She felt that everything except the language in the UK made her feel at home. She thought she had a particular character suitable for studying abroad, and her learning style differed from that implemented in China. Her parents thought the same, which was why they encouraged her to study overseas. Her mother had thought this from a very

young age and wanted Annie to attend high school abroad, but her father thought she was too young.

In preparing to study in the UK, Annie had to achieve specific scores in her undergraduate degree; she had to study very hard to get these grades, which was difficult. She also had to achieve an IELTS score of Band 6.5. She felt that Chinese students were not very good at writing and speaking English. She thought this was because, during their education, the focus was on passing exams, and they were *'seldom to speak by ourselves'* (Interview One). She felt that when writing in Chinese, students did not express themselves. She thought the most challenging thing in the UK was to think critically because, in the Chinese classroom, students received knowledge from their teachers and did not learn how to think about a topic for themselves. Annie believed this was the biggest problem she had had in her essays and that since she had been in the UK, she had learned to think more critically.

Studying in the UK

Annie enjoyed the university; she had many friends from different countries who she met while doing various activities around campus. She thought the university and her school had been very good at helping Chinese students. At the beginning of the first semester, her school arranged a lecture given to Chinese students by a Chinese lecturer. This lecture made her feel *"less homesick"* (Interview One), and she thought it was very kind. The professor gave the lecture in English and talked about tips for living in the area, food, and advice for studying. Annie felt there was support for Chinese students on campus and said that some of the university leaflets were in Chinese. She mentioned the speed at which some of the lecturers spoke; they often spoke very quickly, and she wished they would speak a little slower in the first semester.

The more challenging aspects she described were language, academic language, how many books she had to read, and that she could not read all those books in one week. She did not find language for communicating on campus challenging because she could read body language but writing her

assignments was difficult. She did not know how to structure essays or what the professor wanted her to demonstrate in her essay. She felt she had a better idea now because she made an appointment with her professor to ask about her essay; she found that was the best way to improve her writing and understanding. She thought that many Chinese students did not know how to use the resources available to them, like making an appointment with a professor. Some UK (home) students helped her a lot in realising this. Annie often asked for help from the UK students in her class, and they were helpful; they were her friends now. When Annie started her postgraduate studies in the first term, she *"had a plan for herself"* (Interview One). She chose to sit with different people in different classes and try not to use Chinese much; she thought it would be more beneficial.

Annie described herself as *"outgoing, helpful, energetic, likes challenges and creative"* (Interview One). She thought this experience of studying abroad would benefit her in the future, predominantly through the concept of critical thinking and learning to see things from different perspectives. Annie liked to write articles for WeChat. Before coming to the UK, she wrote from one point of view, which she now felt was not enough. Now she could see and think from different perspectives, which was helpful for her writing. She also thought this experience would benefit her in her future employment. She did an internship last year, and her senior called her recently on the phone and asked her about a problem they were having. Annie found she could give her suggestions and that her senior found those suggestions very helpful.

Annie felt she would be able to do well in the future. Her plan was perhaps to study more. She was interested in law, and her aunt, uncle, and mother studied law, so she thinks she would try to pass the exam to study for a PhD in law in the USA. If she were unable to do that, she would do a postgraduate in law in China, near her hometown.

None of Annie's friends came to the UK, but she did meet people on WeChat through the group set up by the university's office in China. She found one person, and they took the same plane to the UK. The WeChat group was very useful for Chinese students; she felt safe because the university set it up. You

could ask questions to former students, find partners to do activities, buy cheaper things like textbooks, and get information about lectures, professors, and accommodation. Annie also found people to play badminton with on WeChat.

During the second term, Annie felt she experienced much more pressure than in the first term, and there was much more reading to do. She took part in a class about negotiation, which had a lot of practice work. She felt she could improve her negotiating skills from this class, especially when participating in activities with UK students. She also took classes at the writing centre to improve her writing skills. She commented that she had many things to do, but she felt her time management improved. Her reading had also improved; Annie thought she could read quickly now. At first, she only used to read translations of the articles, a method many of her Chinese classmates use. However, now she did not think that was the best method as the translations did not have the correct meaning of the article.

Annie found the writing classes at the writing centre good. The tutor told her that the focus should not be on using too many beautiful words but on writing the meaning of what she wants to convey clearly and then thinking about the words she is using. Annie tried not to use the same words often and spent some time using a thesaurus. She also tried to remember words used in the articles she read; if there were words that she liked, she wrote them in a notebook and used them later. Annie felt her writing has improved a lot; she recently received a high grade for an assignment for the class on negotiation. She thought this was because she focused on writing clearly rather than using too many "beautiful" words (Interview Two). She was satisfied with her grades because she felt she worked very hard and they reflected that.

Annie had started thinking about her dissertation; she had a structure in mind but had not met with her supervisor yet. She was happy with her supervisor, who was one of her seminar tutors.

> "*And I remember during one class that we have a small group discussion, but my partner didn't agree with my point. She didn't want to raise her hand, so I did the conclusion for our team, and I think that my point is*

right. So I mentioned it. And this professor encourage (sic) me and say it's a really good point, so that give (sic) me courage."

<div align="right">Interview Two</div>

Annie commented that she often talked with her professors and found it easy to communicate with them. She also recalled that she had made many UK friends That year: when she had a problem or did not quite understand something, she asked one of her friends, and they gave her advice, and in return, Annie gave them advice. She felt it had been good to have many friends from other countries and not just Chinese friends.

Another positive academic experience Annie reflected on from this term was a group presentation. She thought the group she worked with was one of the best groups she had ever worked with on a project. In the first term, she felt some groupmates did not try to do their best work on their PowerPoint. However, this term, her classmates worked very hard, advised each other, and talked a lot together to make sure it was the best they could do. Annie reflected on her grades:

> *"because I think if I work hard right now I don't need to high grades, but I want the grades to fit my hard-working, but in the group, if someone didn't work hard it will influence the whole scores."*

<div align="right">Interview Two</div>

She was pleased with the group this term because everyone worked hard and communicated well despite being from three different countries. Annie recalled that when she was studying for her undergraduate degree, she had a lot of group work experience. However, it was often a challenge to distribute the work fairly. Because she liked to do everything well, when her groupmates did not do the work, she would do it. She had been very used to doing many things by herself and found it hard to trust that others would do their part well. This year she learned to trust others and delegate; this had been good for her. At the same time, she needed to see evidence that others would do their work to trust them, and she had seen the other group members working hard in class, so she felt confident in her group.

Reflecting on life and studies in the UK

Annie thought that she had adapted most with her time management, reading speed, and writing. After receiving her grades, she reflected on her essays to see what she could improve for the following essay. Another achievement she described was getting a part-time job; she wrote reviews of books for a Chinese website and felt proud when she received her first pay. She felt this had also helped her improve her writing because she also needed to structure the reviews.

Annie was looking for a job now for her return to China. However, if she returned to China before starting that job, she would work for the company she interned at before coming to the UK. She wanted to work for a year and to get a higher job than an intern.

In discussing critical incidents, Annie began with photos of her friend, the restaurants they went to and the food they had. This activity was something she liked to do when she had time. A critical incident Annie mentioned was going to the cinema and watching Captain Marvel and Disney films. After the first term, Annie set herself a goal: to be able to go to the cinema and watch films in English. Her goal was to watch just one, but she had been three times and was proud of this. At first, she thought she might not understand everything and might fall asleep, but this did not happen. She did not set any goals for herself like this before coming to the UK, but she felt she needed to improve herself after the first term. She also organised an event for Chinese New Year for her classmates. In doing this, she felt she could be a good organiser. Annie described herself as someone who likes things to be quite structured:

> *"so I organise everything even chatting to the boy in the US… because I just think because we do have a lot of study and work so we don't have many (sic) time to chat every day, so just to chat on Saturday".*
>
> Interview Two

Another aspect she described as a critical incident is exploring her time management and her organisation skills. She had a picture of her study schedule

on the wall near her study desk. She wrote her tasks on post-it notes and stuck them to the wall, with each task under a particular day in the week. If she could not finish a task that day, she moved it to another day in the week. If she completed the task, she removed the post-it note.

When discussing challenges, Annie said most things were okay, but she worried about her safety. She had read some news articles that made her feel a little unsafe, so she rarely went out in the evening alone. She said she thought the UK was much safer than other countries. Annie reflected that she thought she would be homesick: *"I thought maybe I will be a little bit homesick, but it didn't happen"* (Interview Two). Annie felt there was more pressure on her for her studies at the moment, so she did not have the time to be homesick. She spoke to her family about twice a day, but she thought that because maybe she has grown up and already experienced homesickness in the USA, she did not feel it anymore.

Annie thought a lot about her future and had some plans. Before she came to the UK, she was doing an internship, and at that time, she thought she just wanted to work. However, she felt that she is interested in studying more, so she thought she would work for two years, and then study for another degree, maybe a PhD or an MBA. She had many interests in different subjects and thought she would like to do some translation work in the future. She had an interest in learning languages; she commented that many people translated from English to Chinese these days, and she would like to translate from Chinese to English; she thought it was her responsibility to bring Chinese culture to the world.

She thought that getting married and having children was a step you could take if you would like to, not something that she had to do or that was necessary. Annie talked about her family as being very open-minded, but this was not the same for some of her friends in China. She thought many families changed their minds when they realised their children could arrange these things themselves. She used the example of her father; he was a traditional Chinese man, and when she went abroad to study, he thought she should return to her hometown and find a job. However, now he saw that she got a part-time job and started to earn her own money and that her grades had improved. She had worked very well by

herself, so his perspective changed. He now saw she could do everything for herself and take care of her own life. Annie thought that you need to experience everything that you can and that we have limited time, so we need to do as many things as possible.

Regarding the words that Annie used to describe herself in the first interview, she thought they were the same now, but she would like to add one more word: confident. Though she attributed this confidence to receiving her first pay, she believed she could do everything, and by doing new things, she would gain more confidence.

6.3 Li

Background

Li was a 24-year-old student from Xi'an in the Shanxi province of China. She was studying for a master's in human resource management. For her undergraduate degree, she studied media and communications. However, she felt that media and communications was not something she wanted to do in the future, so she decided on a different major for her postgraduate studies. These days she was trying to be a vlogger and was quite interested in vlogging, which surprised her as before, when she studied media, she did not like to be in videos; however, she now felt that she had changed and that people changed all the time.

Li recalled that when she was in high school, her grades were not very stable and that sometimes she would get exceedingly high marks while at other times, they would drop. She and her mother looked at alternative ways for her to take the university entrance examination because it was only offered once a year, and if you did not pass it, you had to wait for the following year to retake it. She took an art exam that would supplement her literature grades. She attended her chosen university, the top university in China for media and communication.

Li found the transition to university quite challenging. Even though she described herself as a person who did not always follow authority figures like her parents or teachers, she worked hard. She felt that the students at university did not work hard and spent more time socialising. Li asked her mum if she could retake the university entrance examination and attend a different university. Her mother encouraged her to adapt to where she was at the time.

Li studied to be a bilingual broadcaster with French as her other language; she became interested in learning French and felt supported by her French teachers. Li had the choice to go to France and study French for a year or stay in China and continue studying broadcasting. She opted to go to France and spent a year studying at a university near Lyon.

"I chose to go to France, but the first semester was also a little hard because that was the first time for to go abroad… I didn't feel comfortable, and I was on pressure (sic), and I can't focus on my study. I don't know why I choose to come to France. I think that wasting my parents' money I think was doing something useless."

<div align="right">Interview One</div>

Li did not feel that the tutor in her first semester was very good; her tutor was always late to class, let them watch films, and was not very good at explaining grammar. She felt quite disappointed at that time. She called her mum and asked if she could return to China and continue studying at her university. Her mother said she must adjust to life there; she gave her a lot of support and encouragement to stay in France and travel to make the time more enjoyable. Li's father said that if she wanted to come back, she could. Li stayed.

Choosing the UK

Li came to the UK to study for a postgraduate degree for several reasons. To continue studying in France would take two or more years, and she did not think she would pass all the examinations. Her boyfriend was studying in the UK and asked her if she would like to study in the UK. Her mother did not want her to go to the UK; she wanted her to study closer to home. However, getting into a postgraduate programme in China is exceedingly difficult. Li did not want to waste her time trying as she might fail; many of her friends had tried and failed, and some had even tried twice.

Her mother also suggested she could go to Hong Kong, but Li decided to study in the UK; she did not want to be alone like she was in France. The university choices she and her boyfriend had were based on places they could attend together. Li was accepted to many universities because she had good grades and a high IELTS score. Her boyfriend's grades were not that good, so they were limited in what universities they could go to. This time was difficult for Li because she felt she was being pulled in different directions. Her dad said if the university was not good, then it would not be helpful for her future career, but her mother

liked the idea that Li would be with someone while studying abroad. Li often feels a push and pull between her parents; they often have different ideas for her.

> *"It was quite a difficult cause it is the same way with my boyfriend because my dad don't (sic) like him, but mum said it is fine if he is nice to you… you can just stay with him, but my dad said that he is not very smart and he can't get a good mark at studying, he don't (sic) got a very specific goal in his life."*

> Interview One

Li did not study a pre-sessional English course before her master's degree; she received Band 7 on her IELTS. She thinks a degree related to business is helpful for her future: *"I think business is so attractive for me, but you know that accounting or something like that is not for me, so I chose something that is more about human beings or psychology"* (Interview One).

Li was extremely interested in fortune-telling and visited a fortune-teller in the UK. The fortune-teller told her that her boyfriend was not her forever person, that he would go back to their hometown and get a job through his family, but Li would go to Shanghai or Beijing. Li met her boyfriend in high school; they were classmates, and while she was studying in France, he was studying in the UK. He came to visit her in France, and they began dating. Li and her boyfriend planned to get married when they finished their postgraduate studies and went back to China. The fortune-teller told Li that she should enjoy the time in the UK with her boyfriend but that they would not stay together forever. Li and her boyfriend lived together; she felt that it worked well and was a trial to see if they were comfortable living together. They balanced each other well at home. Li also followed their horoscopes; she and her boyfriend matched well with their star signs, which was one reason she decided to date him. She also liked being here in the UK with someone; it was very lonely while she was in France.

Studying in the UK

Li opened up about her studies and course; she had not been very engaged in one of her modules and had missed many classes. She was worried that she would not pass the module.

"It's not every class I skip just one tutor that her class was so complicated, so I don't, I can't understand what she was talking about, so it is quite boring for me to think there so I skipped over I think over half of the classes."

<div align="right">Interview Two</div>

The lecturer for this module said attendance would not be included in the grade but that class participation would be. This course also required students to participate in the online learning environment in Canvas. Li did not take part in this either. Li did not like how the lecturer might grade her on her class participation; she felt it was entirely subjective. Li reflected that it was difficult. In some classes, UK students could be more active because they could follow everything the lecturer said, but it was more difficult for international students as they could not follow every word. She had another class where the lecturer gave them a quiz:

"We the Chinese students we cannot understand what it is saying and perhaps the English people will finish the questionnaire in 5 or 10 minutes, but for us perhaps the whole class was finished, we can't totally understand that, so language is a problem".

<div align="right">Interview Two</div>

There were 30 to 35 students in Li's course, and they took all their modules together. Li talked about how they did not know each other very well in the first term, and when they had a group presentation, the lecturer said the groups needed to be a mix of home and international students as there were about twenty Chinese students in her course. There was a UK student in her group who was particularly good at studying. In the second term, they had to do another group presentation, and they wanted to invite the same student to join them again because they thought their group did well in the first term. When they asked the student, she said no. She said she wanted to join a group with new people, and she joined a group with other UK students.

"At first, I was quite upset and a little angry cause we think we cooperate great, and we participate actively, but still, they didn't want to join us again. But later I think it's normal. Perhaps they want a higher degree, perhaps for doctor (sic). Perhaps they really need a good grade. Perhaps just because we don't have the same demand for grade, we just want to pass, yeah so, I can accept that".

<div align="right">Interview Two</div>

Li had one module that she was interested in, about negotiating. After the class, she emailed the tutor to say that this was the most useful class. She thought this class was practical and could be greatly beneficial for her daily life and her future working life; she never missed one of these classes because she enjoyed them a lot.

Li reflected on the number of Chinese students studying abroad and how that topic was discussed in the Chinese media.

"There's a rumour in China that just like some country the reason that some country some foreign country accept us is partly because of we pay much more than the local people… especially for those university (sic) which didn't (sic) have very good reputation… I think that for some university it is quite true. Of course, the UK government need more money. It's normal. If we have the ability, we would like to ask the foreign students to come to China, and if we can get more money from them, it will be great".

<div align="right">Interview Two</div>

Reflections on life and studying in the UK

Li went to see the fortune-teller again and found what the fortune-teller had to say very interesting; they talked a lot about Li's future. The fortune-teller told her she would be an influencer in the future and help many people. Li saw this as being part of her future career of vlogging. They talked a lot about Li's life, and the fortune-teller described that Li was doing and would do something creative

and independent. The fortune-teller still believed Li and her boyfriend would not stay together and would break up when they returned to China.

Now, Li saw her experience in the UK and her vlogging as being connected because she used the topic of her school life for her vlogs, but once she finished her course, she thought they would be separate. Li saw her studies as necessary for her life as they taught her how to work with others, which was truly relevant to her and her life learning experience. She learned how to manage her life more, and she thought classes like the negotiation class were particularly useful in interacting with others. Even though she was not engaging in every class, she felt she would never regret the experience of coming to the UK to study.

Li compared her studying experience in France to studying in the UK; she thought she would go to France again to travel but not to study or live. When choosing where to go, her parents asked her if she would like to go to the UK, Hong Kong, or France or stay in China. She thought she made the right choice in coming to the UK. She thought that the local city was very welcoming and felt this in her accommodation, which was student accommodation but not managed through the university. There were students from every other country, including UK students; they were welcoming and friendly and often invited her and her boyfriend to join them. Even though she once asked them to be quiet at night when they were making noise, they did not mind that she told them off, and when she wanted to interview them for her vlog, they were friendly and agreed. Li even made Chinese food for them; she did not know if they enjoyed it, but they said they did. She and her boyfriend also invited them to visit a new Chinese restaurant that had opened in London, which they said they would see, and Li thought that they were just being polite and did not want to go. However, a few weeks later, *"they mentioned they would like to go with us and asked my boyfriend when will it be free. Oh, I was surprised about that cause I didn't think, I don't think they would like to go"* (Interview Two).

Li showed a video of her critical incident. She made a vlog about students' attitudes to Chinese students; she interviewed several other students and was surprised by their positive attitudes. She thought people had a more negative

opinion of Chinese students; however, several of the students she interviewed had been to China or had incredibly open views about people from other countries. This was, she felt, different from her experience in France. She also interviewed a lecturer from an art institution in London, who talked very positively about the Chinese students they taught; the lecturer used funny, creative, and amazing words to describe the Chinese students they taught. Li asked the tutor if they had a different attitude towards Chinese students based on things like their language ability. The tutor said they treated and graded everyone the same concerning written work. The Chinese students may have had issues with written English in their assessment, but they were very creative, and the tutor was impressed by their work.

Li felt quite proud of China after completing the interviews; before, she thought there was only the opinion that Chinese students were wealthy, that they might come to study in the UK to get away from their families and that they often spent a lot of money on luxury clothes and bags. However, she found that people have a favourable opinion of Chinese students. In particular, she referred to the views of the other students in her accommodation that they were very friendly. It made Li understand that she could not assume what other people thought, that she should get to know people more, and that she needed to not judge people.

She was unsure of what she would do in the future. The fortune-teller she saw told her she would work for a charity allocating money. She was uncertain because this did not have to do with her degree. The fortune-teller also told her that she would leave the UK, go somewhere else, or go back to China, but her future was not in the UK. Li did not entirely believe everything the fortune-teller told her, but she did think about it. She was not certain whether she would become a successful vlogger, which she would like, but she would try her best. The fortune-teller told her that she would have a promising future in vlogging and that she might be able to set up a business. She said to Li that she might go back to her hometown first when Li returned to China, but then she would go to a big city. Li thought that if she could live in Beijing with enough money and a good house, she would, but if not, she would stay in her hometown.

Li used to think of herself as someone who relied on others, but her opinion had changed since being in the UK.

"Actually, I don't think I rely on others now, cause all the things I do I'm doing it by myself … I'm more independent and more ambitious yeah more brave (sic). I would like to try something new to interact in a world I didn't enter at all."

Interview Two

6.4 Mai

Background

Mai was a 34-year-old female student from Shanghai, where she lived before coming to the UK; she went to elementary, middle, and high school and university in Shanghai. She was now majoring in intellectual information technology and intellectual property law for her postgraduate studies. When she first chose law for her undergraduate degree, she was interested in the subject, and her parents thought it was a good suggestion. She chose it because of her interest and her parent's agreement: *"My parents' suggestion is very important to me"* (Interview One).

Mai worked for nine years at a law firm in China, working in civil and commercial law. She thought there needed to be more of a focus on technology and law with technology and that in that particular area, China was very weak

.

> *"So I think that intellectual property law is needed to the Chinese government… but the law system in Eastern and Western countries are very different. They have the Western countries have a critical thinking about their law systems they have the advanced legal knowledge in their country. So I want to study very different stuff about law it can open my mind and widen my career."*
>
> Interview One

Mai saw a future for intellectual property law in China and believed that there would be a need for intellectual property lawyers, so she was working towards this career move.

Choosing the UK

When Mai thought about postgraduate study, she considered many things: future career, financial income, and the Chinese government's future and direction. When she first thought about studying in the UK, she did not know

much about university ranking and backgrounds. She consulted with her friends, former classmates, and colleagues and received advice and suggestions. She also considered that she needed to learn about studying abroad and how the campus environments would be. When she had different universities in mind, she compared their academic background and ranking. Mai used an education agency to apply to UK universities. This company helped her apply to five universities, and of the five, three gave her offers. This university was her second choice; her first choice was a university further north in the UK. It was her first choice because she followed the football team from the city and would like to go to football games; her undergraduate tutor was a graduate of that university. She was disappointed she did not receive an offer to study from them.

Mai had a positive attitude about studying abroad and recognised that there would be difficulties.

> *"You know sometimes you feel alone because there is only you, for new friends, new teachers, and new surroundings. Everyone is new. But I think if you choose to study abroad, you should have to accept all of this…. You know my family there is only one child me, so sometimes my parents will miss me… but you know that the technology is very advanced so we can chat with each other online."*
>
> Interview One

Mai was supporting herself financially to study in the UK. She thought she would return to China when she finished her studies. She was familiar with the job market and careers in China. Right now, she felt she had two options. The first was to return to her former company because her boss has asked her to go back to work there when she returned. The second was to choose a different law firm or business company and *"create a new career"* (Interview One). She had not decided yet, although she was leaning towards the second option.

> *"I think less (sic) lawyers to be professional in this area and the legislation in China in the property intellectual property legislation is very weak, and if I put myself into this career a wide and career performance, I can have."*
>
> Interview One

Studying in the UK

Mai took the pre-sessional course before she began her master's degree. She found the pre-sessional course beneficial for her academic life in the UK.

> *"Because you know the study method and the academic institute is very different from China. In Chinese universities, the student just need (sic) to listen. You don't need to speak just follow the tutor's thoughts but the pre-sessional course not only training your language skills but also you have to communicate with each other with your tutors and your classmates, and there is a discussion group and a seminar and the lectures, and even the tutors will teach you how to construct your essay how to begin the introduction and how to end the conclusion. There are many new knowledge that the pre-sessional can bring you… it can make you easier to accept the postgraduate study life."*
>
> Interview One

Mai found the second term harder than the first. They studied intellectual property law in the first term, while the second term was mainly information law, which Mai felt was a weak aspect of Chinese law. Mai had fewer classes in the second term, but she felt they had more articles to read and more work to do. In the second term, she felt the self-study aspect was more significant than being taught by a teacher. Mai described the routine of studying in the UK: You attend your seminar, and the tutor gives you work to read and research, but you cannot just complete those articles. Once you do, you need to read more and think more about the direction of your topic or studies. Then your tutor goes through that with you and assigns you more work or reading for your study topic. Even at the end of the term, the tutor assigns a presentation. She felt this was a continuous cycle: *"I think although this is hard to me (sic) at the beginning, but you will enjoy yourself during the process because when you read these articles and to research something you will learn a lot"* (Interview Two).

Mai found her tutors truly kind, pleasant, and patient. At first, she was not extremely comfortable asking many questions in class or to her tutors afterwards.

She thought they would think, why do you not understand this? *"You should understand everything"* (Interview One). However, now she thinks it is essential to ask questions and tell them when she does not understand something. One of her professors told her, you can ask me anything; you do not need to feel ashamed if you do not know something. She became comfortable with asking them questions, especially around assessment deadlines. She felt supported by her tutors and that *"the tutor role is very critical"* (Interview Three).

Mai thought the most significant challenge with her studies is her reading speed: *"I need to spend more time to read, for example, if a local student needs to spend one hour to finish an article I need four hours… even more"* (Interview One). She also found the seminars challenging because often, she could not understand everything the lecturer was saying. She recorded the lecture on her mp3 device and listened to them again after class, and often it was hard to understand what the professor was saying because they spoke too fast for her. However, she checked with the professors, tutors, and classmates to ensure she understood everything. Sometimes during class, if the professor or tutor was speaking too quickly, students would raise their hands and ask them to repeat what they said. Then the tutor would acknowledge that they were talking too fast and would slow down. At first, Mai was ashamed to raise her hand, but now she feels comfortable *"After two weeks we are familiar with each other we are friends, so I think it's nothing"* (Interview One). There were only six to ten students in her classes.

> *"We are friends now. There are Germany (sic), American, Canada (sic) and Indian students in our class. It's an international student class. We will now become friends, very good friends after class. We will make appointment (sic) with each other to go to a coffee shop, to have a walk in the gardens, and talk about our subject and our seminar content."*
>
> Interview One

They all had different ideas but were open to listening to each other. Mai thought that students having an open mind was especially important for their studies. Mai thought her seminars were essential, but both self-study and group study were also necessary because when *"You're talking to your tutor you are*

student (sic), but if you're talking to your classmates, you are friends, that's very different" (Interview Two).

Mai stated that students often felt like their tutors were gods, respected their tutors, and were very professional. Nevertheless, *"I don't always agree with them, and I will argue with my tutor, and they are very glad, and they say yeah, I think you are right, very good"* (Interview Two). However, she thought you needed to be reasonable because you could not disagree for no reason but must support your ideas.

Mai lived off-campus but in university-managed accommodation, which she described as nice because it was modern and safe with plenty of CCTV cameras around. However, initially, she did not feel the accommodation was set up very well:

> *"But sometimes I think there they have some problems in the management. They want to assemble the Chinese students together in the same flat and the foreign student in another flat, and it is hard to communicate with each other."*
>
> Interview One

As the year progressed, Mai changed her opinion of this. She thought it was okay because they had a large, shared area where everyone could meet. If you wished to meet others, you could, and if you wished to stay in your apartment, that was your choice. Mai had made many friends from all over the world; she enjoyed meeting new people and finding out about them. She felt she had learned about people from many different countries and that what she initially thought about other places was not necessarily the case.

Reflections on studies and life in the UK

Mai described an experience she had that she called critical thinking. She was reading an article and could not understand one extremely complicated paragraph. It consisted of only one extremely long sentence. She knew what

every word in the sentence and paragraph meant, but she could not understand its meaning together, and it was a critical part of the article. She asked her English friends and showed them the article, but they said they could not understand what it meant. She was very surprised because they spoke English as their first language; they said this was professional knowledge, and they did not understand law. Mai thought, okay, so this was not about language; it was about content, and the content was complicated. She asked her tutor. Her tutor explained the paragraph to her, he had to go through it a few times, but he was patient until Mai understood what it meant.

Mai showed a PowerPoint presentation she was working on to show her friends when she returned to China, which presented her critical incidents. One of the first things she mentioned was a group project she and her classmates worked on and won first prize. The presentation was on British culture. Her British classmates helped a lot, and she described how it was really good fun putting it together. She was immensely proud that they won first prize. Another momentous experience for Mai was a parachute jump she took. She thought that this was exciting; she felt that this experience made her braver and that while flying down, *"You will think a lot about your life, and you will cherish your life more than before"* (Interview Two)*.*

Two things Mai thought were not particularly good in the UK were the police services and the NHS. She felt that often, when Chinese students reported something stolen or reported something to the police, it was not taken seriously, and you could not depend on the police to help you. She said:

> *"Maybe someone think (sic) a Chinese student is very rich, they don't care enough their wallet, their computer, their smartphone, but I think it is personal property. In my mind, a Western country should protect personal property, but the police system is very disappointing."*
>
> Interview Two

Mai also had an unpleasant experience with the NHS after cutting herself with a knife when she was cooking. She went to a walk-in centre, but she had to wait for four hours before she saw someone. During that time, she thought about

buying a plane ticket to go back to China to visit a hospital. If you book an appointment with the GP, it is always in two or three weeks, so if you are sick, you must find other ways to get better because you cannot see a GP. She thought that though the Chinese medical system had its issues, they were better in emergencies.

At the end of her course, Mai had three job offers from law firms in Shanghai and the UK. She used an agency here in the UK, and for the companies in China, she contacted them herself. She thought about her salary and quality of life. Mai felt she would not get the salary she expected in the UK, so it would be better to return to China. She did not want to start at the bottom of her career. She wanted a job that reflected her experience and education. She would like to work for an intellectual property law firm or a government department. She was also thinking about whether she would get married. She was 34, so she was also thinking about whether she would like to have children. She did not have anybody in her life right then, but she thought she would like to get married if she met someone. She believed this was a personal choice and disagreed that it was something she should do or a responsibility.

Mai felt that one should respect people's attitudes and choices, but in China, that was sometimes difficult; often, your life was not your own, based on different family relationships. If you did not have a husband or children, some of your relatives and family members felt that your life was incomplete, and they might pressure you to get married and have children. Mai disagreed with this, did not accept it and felt that more young people in China were also feeling the same way. A social change was happening in China; more young people were choosing a single life, and the older generations needed to *"endure"* this change (Interview Three). She believed the older generation would not change their minds as it was too hard, but they had to accept their children's choices.

Mai described herself as confident, active, positive, creative, and patient. Reflecting on her experiences of coming to the UK and what she had learned about herself, she discussed this from two viewpoints: academic and personal. She thought her academic experiences had taught her about self-discipline, arranging her time, and learning independently. In her personal life, it had taught

her that she should not limit herself. She should have an open mind, make lots of friends, participate in lots of activities, gain more knowledge from the people around her about diverse ways of learning, be brave, and face challenges. Mai thought that when you overcome your challenges, you will learn more about your life. Studying in the UK gave her insight into her future, career, and personal life.

Mai reflected that in China, she depended a lot on herself. Her life in the UK taught her to rely more on others than just on herself. Furthermore, managing time is crucial because we have a limited life and time, and we need to experience many things. She thought she would arrange her life more reasonably in the future, devoting specific amounts of time to work, family, and personal relationships.

Mai thought she had gone through a transformation while in the UK; she was more independent and braver and had a better idea about her future life; she also had a better idea of managing her life. She still agreed with the words she chose to describe herself in her first interview: confident, active, positive, creative, and patient.

6.5 Yiwen

Background

Yiwen was 23 years old and from Nanyang in Henan province. She studied for her undergraduate degree in China and came to the UK to study for a master's degree. She was studying international marketing. When Yiwen was two years old, she went to a boarding nursery school. She moved back to her parents when she was six years old, began primary school and lived with her parents until she was 18 years old and went to university. When Yiwen was in high school, she studied the science stream. She chose to study civil engineering because she was interested in physics. At that time, her mother allowed her to choose civil engineering because it could create opportunities for Yiwen. Yiwen went to university in Dalian, northeast China. In some universities in China, if you study a good major and want to change to another good major, you can. Her mother thought that the job prospects for female civil engineers were limited, and it would be a promising idea if Yiwen changed her major. Yiwen said that at that time she did not know what she liked, so she followed her mother's advice and changed her major from civil engineering to financial management. Yiwen explained that her mother had a strong influence on her decisions.

Choosing the UK

Yiwen described coming to study in the UK as a long strategy for her. Yiwen and her parents decided when she was in senior high school that she would go abroad to study after her undergraduate degree.

> *"I will go because in China that's very difficult and the competition is very strong to go to a postgraduate study. I don't think I can pass that exam to go to the postgraduate in China, but if I apply for a university in the UK, then it will be easier for me because that is not depends (sic) on just one exam. Just the final exam it depends on the grades for your four years undergraduate and your English skill that will be much easier for me".*

The idea of studying abroad first came about because Yiwen's cousin had studied in Australia ten years previously. At that time, not many students left China to go overseas, and the cousin had many opportunities when she returned to China. Yiwen's mother thought this was a good path for Yiwen.

The master's she was studying in 2017/18 was in finance, but she did not like it and was not happy. She was very confused when she chose that master's degree, and she had wanted to study marketing and management. She chose finance because her mother told her she should study something similar to her undergraduate degree. Her parents and other family members had jobs related to finance, and in China, a career in finance is considered an excellent choice because it has a good salary.

When she told her parents she wanted to change her master's major, they were not happy, and she thought this was the first time she fought with them. She felt she lost some of her confidence during that year studying finance because she did not do very well and failed two modules, which she had to re-sit.

> *"I told them, but they disagree about it, and I tell them that I am not happy… And the most important thing is I can do the decision myself. I know what I am doing now. I know if I do that I will face the challenge as well. But I would like to do the things I like, not what I should do".*

Even though her parents disagreed with her, they told her that if she could apply for the universities and courses she wanted without using an education agent and get accepted, she could do it. If she failed, she had to continue with her dissertation and return to China to find a job. Yiwen did it; she applied to different universities. She chose universities based on their ranking in the world and the UK and the subjects and modules of the courses. She decided to focus more on the subject than on the rank, and she thought she did a better job herself than when she used an education agent.

Studying in the UK

Yiwen undertook the eight-week pre-sessional course in York before studying for her master's there; she found it very useful. She stated that it was not just about IELTS or the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

> *"It tell (sic) you how to better participate in the lecture, the seminar the, tutorial, how to communicate with other students in class. And how to take notes when you listen to the news or the video, how to search resources in the library, how to get a reference when you write a dissertation".*
>
> Interview One

Yiwen still felt that her English language skills were not strong enough for her course this year. She received an unconditional offer for her marketing course but thought that she could not understand the lectures very well when she first started and could not participate. She found this quite difficult; she knew many of the concepts in Chinese but could not understand them in English. She encouraged herself that she had to participate in class.

> *"I said to myself I should put up my hands to talk with the lecturer twice a week the second one five times a week and I did it so I feel much better and I'm not scared of the class, and I talk with my classmates and have some good friends from other countries so that would be helpful for me."*
>
> Interview One

Most of Yiwen's friends were Chinese, but she had some friends from the UK, Greece, and Malaysia. They always spoke English together and helped each other with studying. In the first semester, they did a group project together; she found it a great way to discuss things and become friends.

Yiwen was happy and satisfied with her grades, and they were what she expected.

> *"I think I did well in last term (sic) and this term I feel like more relaxed than the last term, and I do more things about my course, and I think in*

last term I build a system of my subject and I got some information and knowledge about marketing, so I do better this term to apply this to the project and group project."

<div align="right">Interview Two</div>

She reflected that she had received constructive feedback on some of her modules, which she thought was useful and helpful for her. She had three group presentations for one of her modules. In the first term, she worked in an international group including UK students, but in the second term, she was in a group with some of her friends from China. She thought being in a group with other Chinese students was more comfortable because they could communicate more efficiently and use WeChat. She reflected that they had done well because they received the third prize among all the groups. She thought that last term, there had been a mix in their group. However, they did not have a similar cultural background, and some aspects, such as communication and understanding different environments, were more challenging. In the second term, she tried to pay more attention to how she adapted to diverse cultures, how she expressed herself, and how to focus more on the content and opinions rather than on ensuring that her grammar was perfect. She thought her classmates could understand what she said even when it was not grammatically correct.

Yiwen stated that most of the lecturers and tutors were kind and helpful. She discussed how one of her lecturers was from Vietnam and that her European classmates asked for her help after the lecture because they did not understand the lecture's content.

"Just for the thinking style, it is different. I think that really different because the different culture from Asia to Europe is really different maybe because I come from China so I understand what he want (sic) to express but most of our students from Europe they really find it very hard to understand".

<div align="right">Interview Two</div>

She thought this w a s the main point of the international university's strategy: *"So each should try to adapt with the different lecturer from all over the world"* (Interview Two).

One thing Yiwen was concerned about was an open-book exam, as she had never done an exam like this before. It was an exam set by the lecturer, her dissertation supervisor. She thought this lecturer was impressive and constantly challenged them. When they read the assessment criteria for her assignments, Yiwen and her classmates thought it was okay and not exceedingly difficult. However, it was challenging to take in the lecture content and develop a marketing simulation when they were doing the assignment. It was much more complicated than Yiwen and her classmates initially thought. For this assignment, Yiwen said that less than 30% of the class got over 60%, while she got 58%: *"I'm satisfied because I know I didn't do a very good job because I'm confused about some of the things. I cannot do it very well to combine the theory with the practice"* (Interview Two).

Reflection on studies and life in the UK

A critical incident Yiwen discussed was when she was studying in York; a roommate of one of her friends was a victim of severe financial fraud. The student was targeted by being told she had committed offences in China and would be deported from the UK. She lied to many people when she asked to borrow money from them to pay the fraudster, who still pressured her to give them more money, leading the student to stage her own kidnapping. Yiwen's friend was her roommate, and the student's parents and boyfriend contacted her roommate when they started to receive messages about the student being kidnapped. Yiwen acted as a mediator between her friend, the university, the UK police, the Chinese police, and the Chinese embassy. This situation was complicated, and she was terrified, but because she was not directly involved with the student, she could help and act as a mediator. She felt she was a go-between because of the language barrier between the Chinese and the UK police. This situation was not the first scam this fraudster had committed in the UK. The Chinese police and embassy told her it was the first instance in York but that this was happening all over the UK. It was a very dangerous incident, but Yiwen thinks it made her braver and taught her how to take on the responsibility to help others.

Yiwen experienced challenges in her course; she did not have a background in marketing and found some theories and principles of marketing challenging to understand. Many of her classmates had a background in marketing, so compared to them, she found it a bit harder. However, she had a passion for it, and even on her way to campus and around the local city, she saw marketing campaigns that had come up in her lectures or examples she could use in her assignments. She felt she had a marketing talent and understood it well. Yiwen still thought that her grades were not that good compared to others. Nevertheless, she felt that every time she could have done better and that in the next assignment and module, she could do better; she felt she had the confidence to improve.

A difficulty Yiwen described was adjusting to self-study because she was unsure if she would have the motivation and discipline. However, she quickly realised that she would not understand what the lecturer said if she did not self-study and prepare for her lectures. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that there were always limitations to what you could study. She felt that no matter how much time she spent preparing, she would always miss something.

Yiwen planned to return to China. However, she would like to enter an internship in the UK because many Chinese students have graduated with a master's degree abroad. She felt that having internship experience would make her more competitive in the Chinese job market. Yiwen would like to work for a marketing consultation company; her second choice would be to do brand management and analysis. Ideally, back in China, she would like to move to Beijing because there would be more job opportunities, and she felt that things were fairer and more equal in Beijing. It was easier for people from other provinces to have good job opportunities, whereas it was more complex and based more on personal relationships in smaller cities.

If it were easier to get a job in the UK after graduation, Yiwen would stay for another year or two, but there were few opportunities, so she thought she would have to return to China. Yiwen's father would like her to continue studying and

become a lecturer at a university; he encouraged her to think about further studies. However, Yiwen thought she needed more practical work experience before pursuing doctorate studies. She thought she needed experience working, not just theoretical expertise. She would be happy to either work in a company or teach at a university.

Yiwen felt that this year had been transformative for her. She felt extremely comfortable in the UK; she did not need to consider other people's opinions, and she could just take care of herself. If she were in China, she would need to listen to other people's opinions about her life and lifestyle, while in the UK, she could make those decisions for herself. She had thought much about what she wanted for her life. She had been going through an internal dilemma of whether she should create a stable and secure life for herself or think more about progress. She talked about this with a friend:

> *"We have two ways in front of me, each of the way (sic) is not the right way I think… because if I choose this way, I should cross the hill if I choose this way, I should cross the river. Okay, so it's just a different difficult".*
>
> Interview Two

She thought she needed to go forward, making the best decision for herself with what was happening to her at the moment. She could meet and solve any challenge she faced; if one way did not work, she could always try another. Yiwen thought that since she had been in the UK, *"I really know who I am the real person"* (Interview Two). She could see her strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. She could now face her weaknesses, whereas she did not want to admit them to herself before. *"After I search myself, I accept myself so that I can improve myself"* (Interview Two)*.*

Yiwen described how her relationship with her parents had changed over the last year. She was disappointed in herself when she did not complete her studies in York. Over her life, she had felt that her parents were immensely proud of her, but she lost their confidence; she said to her parents that she was afraid they would not love her because she did not do well. Yiwen described her father as

quite traditional and not a person who often expressed his love easily. When she said she was scared they would not love her, he did not want her to think that, and he wanted her to know that they loved her no matter what and that they were always proud of her. Previously, her father would often pressure Yiwen about her studies, asking her about her grades, and if she thought she did just "so" in an exam, he would ask her why she did not do better: Did she not prepare enough? Now if she said she just did *"so so,"* he said that was enough. He had become more supportive of Yiwen, which had helped her relax and not put so much pressure on herself, so she felt much more positive. *"My parents always say you should be the best. I am not really always be the best (sic), that's okay"* (Interview Two).

Yiwen described herself as kind, positive, hard-working, and confident. Though she suffered a setback in her confidence last year, she felt naturally confident, and this returned as she was studying something she loved and was enjoying life. She also wanted to add critical and peaceful to the words she initially chose to describe herself.

Chapter 7 'Being and Becoming'

<u>Research Question</u>: How do Chinese international master's students at a UK higher education institution perceive the impact of their sojourn on their development of self?

> *"When I finish everything, I see why I'm so great, and I'm also very proud of myself. I also think my parents is (sic) also proud."*
>
> <div align="right">Akira, Interview Three</div>

Chinese international master's students perceive the impact of their overseas sojourn for a master's degree as significant to their development of self. The period of their sojourn in the UK brings opportunity for openness and growth; they develop in ways they did not anticipate, they are proud of increased levels of self-belief, and they see themselves as having more agency in their life decisions and choices. They are not the same people who arrived in the UK the year before. Through 'being and becoming,' we can understand how the participants in this study perceive themselves as emancipated from their former selves.

Through the lens of *Bildung*, we can see the academic sojourn experience as 'being and becoming,' which from a theoretical perspective can be applied to the lived experiences of Chinese international master's students. This chapter expands on the synopsis of the research question above. The following areas emerged from the data and literature review as best suited to discuss 'being and becoming.' Section 7.1 delves into the concepts of the self, present and imagined, and looks at the participants' agency and the actors in their lives. Section 7.2 discusses the concept of motivation as an investment and its role in a theory of 'being and becoming.' Section 7.3 addresses the findings on how educative practices are a form of emancipation and freedom for Chinese international students. These three areas bring together how Chinese international master's students perceive the impact of their sojourn on their

development of self and establish a theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming' outlined in Section 7.4. 'Being and becoming' frames the student experience in the lived experience of the self and the processes and journeys one undertakes to traverse into their imagined future self. 'Being and becoming' through educative experiences is a period of transformation for the self.

7.1 Concepts of the self

By using narrative research, I captured the unique and rich descriptions of the participants' lived experiences. Narrative research draws from people discussing their lives, experiences, and choices (Elliot, 2005). The participants talk about how they see themselves in what they are doing and what they wish for in their lives. Using semi-structured interviews as the method of investigation, I delved into concepts of the self; from the participants' responses, I investigated further with follow-on questions. The subsections in Section 7.1 on the concepts of the self look at how the participants perceived their present and imagined future selves, reflecting on how they felt at the beginning and the end of the research process and how this corresponded with their 'being and becoming'.

7.1.1 Present self

As the participants discussed their lives and experiences, beginning in China and coming to the UK, two aspects shone through their stories: independence and freedom. An example of 'being and becoming' was how the participants came to see themselves as independent through their academic sojourn. They could plan and make choices and decisions for themselves, something they did not have a great deal of experience with before coming to the UK. *"Everything here, it was, it depends on myself"* (Akira, Interview Two).

Independence and freedom are further manifested through their academic study. Studying in the UK academic system was unfamiliar to the participants; it asked them to discover for themselves, encouraging a display of agency in their studies (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). This academic system is different from the Chinese education system, where students are given much more direction and must follow the professor's or lecturer's teaching. *"In Chinese universities, the student just needs to listen, you don't need to speak just follow the tutors' thoughts"* (Mai, Interview One). In the UK, students are asked to challenge what they are being taught and bring their thoughts, ideas and opinions: *"I like the*

critical thinking in the English academic study, it is new for me" (Mai, Interview One).

The participants described themselves with certain personality traits and who they thought they were at the end of the first interview. At the end of the subsequent interviews, I asked if they would like to change, add, or remove any of those descriptors. Most participants added descriptors, often words like 'brave' and 'courageous', that they had not thought they were. However, after this experience of academic sojourn, the participants could see in themselves these traits.

> *"I can think a thing in two different sides, and I don't know how to describe another character for myself, but I think I brave (sic). Yeah, I'm brave to choose the way. Also, even if they are all wrong. I'm happy to face the difficult."*
>
> Yiwen, Interview Two

Others such as Li changed to the opposites of the words they had said previously, such as having said they were dependent and reliant on others and now recognising after living in the UK for some time that they were independent and could do nearly everything or at least most things by themselves: *"I'm more independent"* (Li, Interview Two).

This example of 'becoming' is more towards their living experience and relates to the wider concept of *Bildung* as discussed in Section 1.2, pp. 23-26. The participants showed a determination to undertake something and follow through on it. For many participants, a word frequently used to talk about themselves was 'proud'. They may not have achieved the highest grades. However, because they were satisfied with their work or overcame challenges, they were proud of themselves and what they had achieved both in learning and life.

During the interviews, none of the participants referred to their being female as having an impact on how they perceived themselves in the context of studying for a master's in the UK. As mentioned earlier, when discussing their identity, they focused on their age and being Chinese. I focused on these aspects when

bringing the participants' accounts and findings together and chose not to bring in feminist theory to explore these accounts because it was not a factor the participants focused on.

7.1.2 Imagined future self

An aspect of this study is how a student's imagined future self manifests through their academic sojourn. Something particular about this cohort of students is that their academic sojourn is for only one year; this manifestation feels more apparent than an undergraduate or postgraduate research student studying for much longer (Marginson, 2018). The participants of this study seemed able to describe their imagined future selves quite clearly as they continuously self-reflected over a short period. This manifestation revealed itself in how they described their future, what they would do post-study and how their studies had influenced those plans. Discussions of the future were focused on employment, study opportunities, and living plans, with many of the participants thinking about moving to somewhere other than their hometown. Bamber (2014) also reported similar discussions of the future, which Bamber attributed to the motivations students expressed for studying overseas. One contrasting element between the findings in this study and Bamber's (2014) was the discussion of marriage. The participants in Bamber's study discussed how their overseas study experience would improve their marriage prospects, whereas, except for Akira, the participants in this study talked about marriage but from a social change perspective and did not feel that it was necessary.

> *"Actually, my family, my family's members, their mind all very open. Yes, a very lucky thing that I got from my life. Like my mum just told me, I just wanted to want you to marry a person that you like, not just for the necessary (sic)."*
>
> Annie, Interview Two

In discussing the future, for the participants in this study who thought they would return to their hometown, such as Akira, it was primarily for financial and family

reasons, moving back home to take care of their parents. For others, Mai, Li, and Yiwen, there was a distinct desire to move elsewhere to increase their employment opportunities and continue the sense of independence and freedom they had gained through studying overseas.

> **Mai:** *"Right. I'll be honest, I don't like to live with my parents, but I'm the only child in my family. I own it. I also have my own house in other areas (sic) but my parents don't agree. Before I get married, to move to another place.*
> **Eileen:** *OK, but if you move for your job to another city, then that solves that situation?*
> **Mai:** *Yeah. Because you're moving for your jobs (sic), I can be independence (sic)."*

<div align="right">Mai, Interview Three</div>

We could imagine that as a group of female participants, they might reflect on their biological sex or gender as relevant to the choices they made; however, the participants did not refer to their sex or gender identity as having an impact on their choice to study in the UK. They focused primarily on how their sojourn would impact their career, employability prospects, where they might live and their subsequent quality of life. I did ask in the interviews whether they had thoughts of marriage and family for their future. When asked about possible future choices with marriage and family, two of the participants who were in their thirties, Akira and Mai, had distinctly different responses. Akira spoke as if this would be something that would happen as a direct trajectory. Mai, though, spoke of this being a choice and only if it would be the right choice for her; however, not being married might be difficult concerning her parents' feelings about her living alone. The participants in their twenties again had varying responses. Li and Yiwen did not mention marriage or family in their future and were strongly focused on making choices that would let them follow their own paths. Annie did discuss how her family felt about her choices and the societal pressures that exist around marriage and family for Chinese women. She described being lucky that her family did not follow those societal pressures, and if she did choose to get married in the future, it would be her choice and to a person of her choosing.

This shows a possible generational conflict of perspective around marriage and family and that for these participants, the cultural practice of hypergamy as discussed in Section 2.1.1, p. 39, does not play a significant role. It could be that these participants have a higher socio-economic status due to their education and educational capital and are following the shifting social trends of marrying later or not marrying at all. With the participants all being female, this could be discussed further; however, I chose not to focus on this in answering the research question based on the weight the participants put on their sex as female when discussing their sojourn in the UK and their imagined future selves.

The period of academic sojourn allowed the participants to visualise a future self, their 'becoming', that came across as more concrete at the end of their studying experience than at the beginning. When asked in the first interview what they thought they would do after completing their studies, they often referred to returning to China and taking up employment in their hometown or another city. When asked at the end, their plans became more detailed, with specific elements such as moving to another city or staying in their hometown and why that might be an appropriate choice, weighing up the options with finances, often the age of their parents and wanting to be close to them but not necessarily returning to live with them. Annie and Yiwen discussed whether they would choose to study for a PhD but discussed in detail how they felt they needed to procure professional experience in their field before beginning further studies, contrary to the advice from their fathers.

The participants reflected on how their mindsets had changed and how they felt independent and free, more comfortable being themselves.

> *"Yeah but if we stay abroad, I stay in UK (sic). I feel comfortable in the daily life because I just care about myself. In China, you must listen to everybody's said (sic). What you should do? What's the criteria? What's the lifestyle? How you should behave or something like that."*
>
> Yiwen, Interview Two

In addition, the participants discussed how their newfound thought process might work in Chinese society and how they saw Chinese society changing, with the number of young people studying overseas being a factor in this.

7.1.3 Agency and actors

An additional aspect present when we use narratives in research is the sense of agency and the actors in a person's life. In talking about their lives and choices, they speak about the people who influence them and often guide them on their life trajectories.

Annie's and Yiwen's fathers would like them to continue studying and undertake PhDs in their fields of study. Mai's parents had input in her choices when choosing her undergraduate degree. However, as she funded her studies in the UK, the choice to study in the UK was hers. For all three, the choices they will make for their future are theirs, though they take their parents' opinions into account. Annie found that her studying experience abroad would allow her to make choices that will continue the freedom and independence she felt over the last year. This opinion and example of 'becoming' is reiterated by other participants as well. Yiwen said that this experience had allowed her parents to see that she could make decisions about her future. Another aspect that Annie and Akira mentioned as important in their relationship with their parents was earning their own money. Working part-time demonstrated their ability to be independent and was something their parents could consider in the future.

> *"So I think some family changed their mind because they think ok my children can do this thing by him or herself…You know when I came abroad, and he (Annie's father) thinks that ok, you need to go back to your hometown to have your job. But when he saw ok, I have got a part-time job and started to earn money. And my grades has improved (sic). And I worked very well by myself. So he thought, ok, you can do this by yourself."*

> Annie, Interview Two

We can see from Annie's statement that the transformative experience of studying overseas also impacts those close to them, such as their parents. Their parents, it could be said, also go through a particular transformation that may propel the student into their imagined future self if that transformation is one of support.

Participants whose studies were funded by their parents mentioned the importance of being able to repay their parents, whether through finances or other means, and how their parents' opinions influenced their decisions. For Akira, this was a conflict when she chose to study in the UK. She had to argue with her parents to be allowed to go, declaring that this was her last opportunity and that if she did not study abroad now, she would never be able to; it was her *"last chance"* (Akira, Interview One).

Li discussed her parents' influence on her choices, but they let her make her own choices and supported her. In her narrative, she mentioned two actors who had influenced her decisions: her Chinese boyfriend and a fortune-teller she had visited many times. She discussed her boyfriend and her experience of studying in France, where she was alone and which she found quite difficult. Studying in the UK was strongly influenced by her boyfriend wanting to study for a master's degree in the UK.

> *"It was mainly because my boyfriend…he asked me if I would like to study in the UK but my mother don't want me to go to the UK to study at first, she thinks it is better for me to study in Beijing or somewhere that I can come home during the time there."*
>
> Li, Interview One

She thought it would be better to live abroad with someone rather than by herself. Li discussed her visits to the fortune-teller and that though she did not necessarily believe everything the fortune-teller said, she took some guidance from it, giving her things to think about when making her choices.

7.2 Motivation as investment

The 'being and becoming' of Chinese international master's students can be seen through their motivation to undertake these studies as an investment (Norton & Toohey, 2014). The participants' experiences allowed them to understand themselves and how these experiences could guide them in achieving their imagined future selves (Dörnyei, 2009). The concept of *Bildung* was a framework for freedom from their parents and emancipation from society for participants such as Mai and Yiwen. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the independence and freedom they gained through the educative practices of studying overseas allowed them to make their own choices and to believe that they could make the best choice for themselves.

Among the participants, one identifier stood out as an influence on their motivation for investment, and that was age. Two participants, Mai and Akira, were in their thirties and had been employed in China. Mai had had a career in her field for close to ten years. In contrast, the three other participants, Annie, Li, and Yiwen, were in their twenties and had undertaken their master's studies straight after completing their undergraduate degrees. Mai and Akira connected the whole experience of studying abroad with what this experience would bring them in many different areas of their lives. Yes, it would be highly beneficial for their careers, but they were also interested in what living in the UK would provide them holistically. It was interesting how, in contrast, Yiwen, Anne, and Li approached this slightly differently. Yiwen and Anne were focused on job prospects, what they would do post-studies for their careers, and how this academic period of sojourn would benefit their careers. On the other hand, Li focused primarily on the experience of being in the UK. The experience would not necessarily lend itself to employability prospects in the traditional sense. However, it would provide content and material for her vlogging and social media presence that she could use to bolster followings and develop a future as a social media influencer.

Looking at the five participants, we can reflect on their motivation as an investment, their reasons for studying in the UK, and why they chose that course (Norton & Toohey, 2014; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009). Annie, Mai, and Yiwen

expressed a passion for their subjects and wanted to learn more to achieve a good master's degree that they could use to work in their field of study. Akira was motivated by the experience it would provide and the benefit for her employment opportunities, but she did not express a passion for her subject. Li described studying in the UK more as an opportunity when she was at a crossroads, deciding what to do after her undergraduate degree. She compared the options of studying in China, where it would be challenging to get into a postgraduate programme, and studying in Hong Kong, where she would have to go alone, whereas in the UK she could be with her boyfriend.

> *"She (Li's mother) thinks I should be near the home, but you know that it is quite difficult to get a degree of postgraduate in a very good university in China, so I don't want to waste my time. If I fail, it is one year wasted, but a lot of friends around me tried. They tried twice, but they didn't get into it. Yes, so a better choice to come here. My mother also suggest me to go to Hong Kong. It is similar like here, and I don't need to take the examination, but because of him so because in a different country I would like to have someone to be there, to be accompanied."*
>
> *Li, Interview One*

Through Li's words, we can hear what the challenges of studying for a postgraduate degree in China would be, primarily, entry to a 'good' course. In the descriptions of these choices, it also seemed that studying a postgraduate course was an unspoken path she would take. However, she did not have a particular passion and chose what sounded attractive to her. From Li's statement above, we can discuss the options of undertaking a postgraduate course just to do one versus choosing a postgraduate course that you feel passionate about and want to do. These perspectives reiterate that for master's students choosing to study abroad, motivation is key to their success and experience of being in the UK. Those participants such as Mai, Annie, and Yiwen, who were highly engaged with their course, also felt they were doing well academically.

7.3 Educative practices as emancipation

I have titled this section 'Educative practices as emancipation' to name the lived experience of 'becoming' through the lens of *Bildung*. As discussed in Section 3.2.3, pp. 69-70, these educative practices provide the space for developing oneself through freedom and emancipation. The following sections answer the research question and discuss the participants' perceptions of their development through the educative practices in their year of academic sojourn.

7.3.1 Academic experiences

Much of what the participants discussed concerning their academic experience has been touched on or extrapolated in previous research discussed in Chapter 2; one such topic is pre-sessional courses (Copland & Garton, 2011; Laffan, 2018). Those who undertook a pre-sessional course found it to be beneficial as it provided the foundation blocks for how those participants began their studies. This supports findings from my IFS (Laffan, 2018), which detailed how the pre-sessional experience was when students could prepare themselves for their studies. As discussed by Mai, Section 6.4, she could begin to understand the UK academic culture and style of study, how to reference and structure essays, and how to interact with her classmates, tutors, and lecturers. The students could not compare this if they had not completed the pre-sessional programme but could only imagine that they would have found it much more challenging to adapt to studying in the UK. Two participants, Annie and Li, did not have any experience with pre-sessional programmes as they had achieved sufficient IELTS scores to fulfil the conditions of their offer.

All the participants expressed that transitioning to academic study in the UK was challenging. These challenges ranged from finding it difficult to understand their lecturers in the first term to reading speed, expressing themselves in English, and understanding what was required of them. However, all the participants except Li discussed how they felt their studies had improved during their course. They were able to identify specific improvements such as articulating for clarity

when writing or presenting: *"I cannot use too many beautiful words when they [the academic writing centre] say you only need to write your mind very clear (sic) and then try to build the vocabulary"* (Annie, Interview Two). Additionally, many felt their reading speed had improved; during the first interview, Mai and Akira talked about how it could take up to four hours to read one article. By the end of their course, this, along with their overall time management, had improved.

Three participants, Annie, Mai, and Yiwen, described their positive interaction with their studies; they expressed a dedication and passion for what they were studying and wished to learn a lot. They talked about how they worked hard but did not always get the highest grades.

> *"I think I'm happy. I'm satisfied because I know I didn't do did a very good (sic) job because I'm confused about some of the things. I cannot do it very well to combine the theory with the practice, with my options, my decisions… So I think, oh, I'm happy, although it's not a very excellent grade."*
>
> *Yiwen, Interview Two*

However, as Yiwen describes above, they felt that their grades reflected their work and were satisfied. They understood their shortcomings and saw feedback as constructive for improving their next assignments.

Akira expressed difficulty with her studies and that she was barely passing her assessments. She thought this was because she procrastinated and her English language abilities were not particularly good. Akira said she understood the content of the material in Chinese but found it exceedingly difficult in English. She stated that she was disappointed in herself because she was not more proactive with her studies. For each new assignment or project, she told herself she would do better and study harder. However, she did not quite achieve that and then felt regret when she received her grades. These are the qualities and dispositions (Barnett, 2009) discussed in Section 3.2.1, p. 68, which Barnett posits add to the 'supercomplexity' (Barnett, 2000) of the student experience.

Li provided an interesting and what could be described as an opposite interaction with her studies. She was not too interested in what she studied. Furthermore,

she mentioned a particular module whose content she found difficult to follow; she did not enjoy the lecturer's style or how they ran the course. She disengaged with that module, stopped attending lectures, and did not participate in the virtual learning environment. It has been interesting to analyse Li's story considering previous literature. This is not to say that Li's perspective is uncommon; it is simply a voice that has not appeared much in previous research.

The findings of this study support much of what has been discussed in the literature outlined in Chapter 2. However, these findings add another dimension when viewed through the lens of *Bildung*, how these experiences with their academic studies were part of the participants' development of self and how they perceived these experiences.

7.3.2 Sense of belonging

An aspect worthy of much discussion in the student experience is how the academic sojourn is felt through a sense of belonging. Through the lens of *Bildung* and as evident in the participants' accounts, this sense of belonging is rooted in their social networks and community. Social networks are a more apt way of describing friendships as those friendships are often for different reasons. Students have friends they socialise with, friendships that have come about through their studies and academic course, and friends that are part of the overall community. Chinese students are the most significant international student community in the UK. This community features strong ties, and many students choose to stay in this community. The participants described a desire to meet and interact with students from other countries in their course of study rather than solely Chinese students. As the Chinese community is robust, there would always be opportunities to interact and be friends with other Chinese students (Wu & Hammond, 2011).

During their studies, they had opportunities to create social networks with students from other countries. Mai and Akira, who studied law courses, had a positive experience connecting with their classmates and those not from China. There seemed to be more opportunities to interact, and when undertaking group

projects, they would always be in groups with students who were not Chinese. For Li, Yiwen, and Annie, who were studying business courses, this was much more difficult as often the Chinese representation in their classes was close to 90%. The proportion of Chinese students limited the opportunity to interact with students from the UK and other countries and caused some friction between student groups. Li found that her classmates who were not Chinese did not want to interact or join study groups and project groups with Chinese students. There was a divide: "*There is another group presentation and the foreign people especially like the English people who perhaps want good grades, they don't want to group with*" (Interview Two). A similar opinion has been expressed in previous research on inter-nation group work (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2017). This upset Li: "*I was quite embarrassed because we think that we have a good experience with them*" (Interview Two).

However, as Yiwen said, she was able to cross this barrier. Yiwen described herself as a confident person and was not afraid to reach out, connect and interact with others. Furthermore, she did not find it a deterrent when assigned a group project with only Chinese classmates. She used the experience as a chance to demonstrate her leadership abilities and contribute the best that she could so that she and her groupmates would do well: "*I will take part the group very positive, in each group no matter the local people or Chinese people I think that is good and will be good for us to improve our self*" (Yiwen, Interview Two).

7.3.3 Critical incidents

When asking the participants to provide examples of critical incidents, I left it open-ended, wanting them to bring experiences they felt were critical. Most of these incidents were related to life and not necessarily to their studies. Mai was the only participant who described winning a presentation prize for her course as a critical incident. She enjoyed working on the presentation with her classmates, who were from many different countries. She felt proud that their group came first. Her other critical incident was skydiving, which she found exhilarating. Mai reflected that the skydive allowed her to take stock of her life

and choices and solidify what she wanted to do in the future and how she wanted to live.

For Annie, it was experiencing aspects of life in the UK, meeting friends, and visiting different restaurants where they could try food they had not eaten before. In addition, Annie described going to the cinema and watching a film in English with no subtitles and feeling she could understand what was happening. She had an additional incident that she felt was critical, getting a part-time job and earning her own money for the first time. Earning her own money and going to films gave her a sense of achievement that she was becoming in the world.

Li described doing a video project for her vlog that changed her perspective on how she thought people from other countries viewed Chinese students and Chinese people. She described how she learned from that experience and that what she thought was not how it was for many people. The people she interviewed enjoyed Chinese culture and had visited or would like to visit China. A lecturer she interviewed was impressed by the achievements of Chinese students. When she described several events from her year in the UK, she often viewed them with a critical eye and initially felt that people thought badly of Chinese people but found that that was not necessarily the case.

For Yiwen and Akira, their critical incidents were not positive regarding what happened but had positive outcomes for them. Yiwen described a situation when she was studying in York in which a housemate of her friend was involved in a fraudulent scam that was profoundly serious. Yiwen acted as a go-between for the police in the UK and the police in China. It was a challenging experience, but she felt it asked her to step up and help as best she could to resolve the situation. Yiwen describes how this experience gave her strength and confidence.

Akira's credit card details were stolen, and somebody stole money from her. To overcome this, she found a part-time job to pay her living expenses and contribute to her tuition fees. She had never before had the experience of having to resolve a problematic situation herself. She was proud of herself for being able to overcome the challenge. Akira also described the ability to get a part-time

job at McDonald's as a critical incident. She never imagined she would be able to work in the UK and learn a lot from her colleagues and the training programmes at McDonald's. It was one of her most significant achievements from her time in the UK.

The critical incidents described in the participants' stories present a view of the lived experience, experiences that are not always reported in research and that show a different perspective on and side of the lives of Chinese international master's students. As discussed in Section 4.5.1, pp. 91-92, these are moments or events that are critical in what they mean for the individual (Eraut, 1994). Previous research has used critical incidents in discussions of seminars and lectures (Gu, 2009; Volet & Jones, 2012; Spencer-Oatey, 2013). In contrast, the participants of this study tended to talk much more about events outside of academic studies and events that had severe implications, such as Yiwen and Akira. These accounts shed new light on how critical incidents can be used when researching Chinese international master's students and international students.

7.4 *Bildung* as 'being and becoming'

'Being and becoming' is the transformation and development of the self. This transformation is explored through the concepts of the self, agency, motivation as investment, and freedom and emancipation through educative practices. Figure 7a shows the movement between these to form a theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming' informed by the participants' narratives and influenced by previous research in the field.
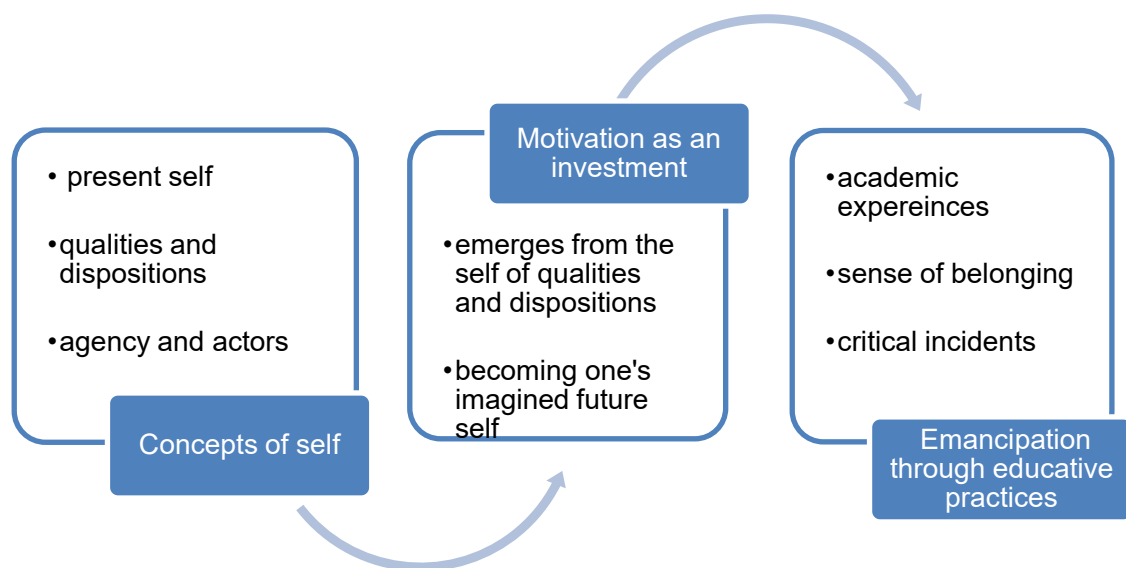
Figure 7a 'Being and becoming'

The first aspect of this concept of self is seeing what the participants thought when they began their academic sojourn and how they perceived themselves at the end. When thinking about their expectations of studying abroad, the participants reflected that they expected to learn and increase their knowledge in a specific area or field of study before coming to the UK. What they experienced, which was not expected, was about understanding and seeing different perspectives: *"I can think a thing in two different sides"* (Yiwen, Interview Two). This aspect was not something they had considered, as the participants said they had never encountered this thinking style before and had not thought it was something they might experience. This view was also present in the

findings of my IFS (Laffan, 2018). This new style of thinking is a novel experience for them. The participants in this study embraced this and found it was the aspect of learning that stood out: *"In one year, I think I have changed a lot, and I must say that I have changed a lot, my mind, my idea, my views have changed a lot"* (Akira, Interview Two). Furthermore, this transformation of thinking was felt as a sense of achievement that represented an international or global perspective; as Annie states, *"Before I go to the UK, I only have Chinese views, but that I am here I think it is global now"* (Interview Two).

Four out of five participants expressed how many aspects of their lives they would never have experienced if they had not decided to study abroad. In particular, the ability to think critically and express themselves based on different perspectives. This experience was transformational, where they could explore who they were and take on new challenges in their life. They could push themselves differently to experience new things and make the most of the experience.

One of the first concepts that stood out when I began this research journey was Marginson's self-formation (Marginson, 2014; 2018). However, through the interviews and stories the students told, self-formation did not completely fit. The data were calling out for something more, which brought me to the conceptual lens of *Bildung* and developing a theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming'. The stories these participants told were rich and full of experience. They acknowledged their transformation and development. By no means did any participant describe a fixed endpoint; the transformations they experienced were continuous and ever-changing.

'Being and becoming' is the perception of one's development of self. It is the realisation of knowing who one is in the world and who one wishes to be. It is the realisation of their freedom and emancipation through educative practices. It implies that experiencing life and studies outside their own national and familial culture has allowed them to explore different avenues and ways of being.

Chapter 8 Professional Practice in Student Experience

This chapter addresses the objective laid out in Chapter 1 of how the findings from this study can provide a better understanding of Chinese international master's students' experiences and, in turn, develop the Student Experience Division to serve Chinese international master's students better. I have dedicated an individual chapter to this. As an EdD candidate, I aim to inform and influence professional practice in this space. This is important as much of the research on student experience has focused on the areas of academic study (Zhou et al., 2008; Montgomery, 2010). However, as Chapter 7's theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming' shows, academic study cannot be isolated from a student's whole experience. Section 8.1 discusses the findings of how student experience as a journey aligns with Student Experience as a division. Section 8.2 provides recommendations for Student Experience Division colleagues to develop the internationalisation of student experience, specifically focusing on international students.

8.1 Understanding the student experience of Chinese international master's students

As mentioned in the narrative stories of the participants, an international Chinese student may have specific needs. These needs are often academic-related, as students require additional support in understanding the academic culture of the UK and the institution. This issue has been addressed extensively in the canon of literature discussed in Section 2.4, pp. 48-53. Furthermore, as we can understand, though it is not explicitly stated, students do not often see the areas of a university as working separately. However, there must be some cohesion across the academic and professional service provision.

The findings of this study show that Chinese international master's students do not always feel like an integrated part of the student community and often exist on the periphery with their co-national community; this is supported by the

literature as discussed in Section 2.5, pp. 54-56 (Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009; Wu & Hammond, 2011; Laffan, 2018). Chinese international master's students often choose to direct issues and queries to co-nationals rather than seek out the specific services on campus (Taha & Cox, 2014). As stated by the participants, they feel their co-national peers will understand the issues without a language barrier.

An aspect that emerged through the participants' perceptions of themselves is motivation as an investment in the imagined future self. As presented in the findings, students experience varying levels of motivation. Understanding this aspect of the student journey provides the opportunity to map student experiences, which one could use to design and insert interventions at appropriate stages so a student who may be disengaged, as Li described, can be assisted and their particular challenges addressed.

Since the first studies of international students studying in the UK and overseas, there have been discussions of adjustment and acculturation (Laffan, 2018) focusing on how international students adjust, often from a perspective that the onus is on the international student. The participants in this study state that they are aware they are coming to an unfamiliar country, living and studying environment. Issues that were discussed in the 2000s are still being discussed. At this juncture, I would deem that the approach may need to change. Supposing a higher education institution wishes to recruit international students and increase international student numbers, it must also reflect on what this means for home students and that they need to be prepared for those student numbers.

A challenge reflected in the narratives of Li is feeling alienated from fellow students and their lecturers because they are part of the Chinese student community. Other participants such as Akira and Mai describe the support they felt from the lecturers and their classmates. As mentioned earlier, this disparity in experience seems to relate to the number of students on a course and whether the student body of the course is predominantly international or home students. Courses with fewer students have a community feel that is difficult to create in larger courses such as business. As discussed in Section 7.3.2, pp. 159-160, this can be described as a sense of belonging. From the findings, I interpret a

possible solution to be the marketing and recruitment of a higher education institution. International recruitment often promotes that an institution is international in its student and staff community makeup. The same promotion could be directed towards home students.

By no means is this a straightforward trajectory for a higher education institution. To some extent, it requires an institutional culture change. As discussed in Section 2.4.1, pp. 49-50, the literature has shown that there can be negative attitudes towards Chinese international students where the idea of an 'Asian learner' is perpetuated (Jabber et al., 2019; Montgomery, 2010). Li discussed how she felt this directly with what she deemed a lack of consideration of tutors and lecturers for students speaking English as an additional language and the difficulty of group work with domestic students. This issue needs to be tackled at a cellular level in an institution, considering how domestic students are also prepared to come to a university with many international students. It is commonplace for higher education institutions to have an internationalisation agenda, and group work with international students will most likely continue to be a primary aspect of their course pedagogy (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2017).

While a professional service that incorporates the international student experience needs to be developed and maintained, the limitations must also be understood. The narratives show that elements of a student's personality and motivation to study in the UK can influence their experience. This is clearly outside a higher education institution's control. These are Barnett's (2009) dispositions and qualities that influence motivation as an investment; for example, Li, whose reasons for choosing her course and studying in the UK might be less directed than others, often described the difficulty of working with her classmates and being engaged in her studies. In comparison, Yiwen described the motivation for choosing her course and studying at this university and what this experience would bring. Yiwen worked hard at getting to know her classmates and embracing her studies, and Mai and Annie presented a similar dedication. This insight could imply that understanding student motivation as an investment may increase the number of students dedicated to embracing the whole student experience.

As mentioned in Section 1.1, p. 22, my role at the research institution has changed since I began this thesis. In my current role, I am dedicated to the international student experience, incorporating the international perspective into the overall Student Experience Division. I feel this will be a positive change and will reduce the othering of international students in the long term. However, it is still very much in its early stages. By incorporating international and domestic students in the vision of the Student Experience, the institution follows the ethos that students view the institution holistically. Similarly, the institution can view its student community holistically, channelling support services more equitably.

8.2 Incorporating international student experience into Student Experience

Using a theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming' and understanding the student experience as discussed in Section 7.4, pp. 163-165, and Section 8.1, I have developed a set of recommendations for the Student Experience Division. These recommendations reflect the insights provided by the participants in this study.

8.2.1 Recommendations

1. In the Student Experience Division, professional service colleagues should collaborate across the institution to develop and embed an intercultural competency course for both staff and students. This course should provide the skills to engage with people from diverse cultural backgrounds who may not speak English as a first language. This course should be mandatory and address any cultural bias staff and students may have.

2. To expand intercultural fluency and move towards culture change, I recommend that students are part of the development of this programme and that it is co-created with international students to ensure that it is for the student community by the student community. Providing co-creation opportunities for students will enact 'being and becoming' and the development of self.

4. Within the programmes, projects and services in the Student Experience Division, the international student perspective must be incorporated from inception to delivery. In particular, the Student Experience Division needs to ensure that international students in general and Chinese international master's students in particular are aware that all these programmes and services are for them as part of the university community. The above may

require increased resources and promotion, but it may positively impact the Chinese student community if embedded as the status quo.

5. Student Experience Division professional service colleagues should work closely with areas of marketing and recruitment to ensure that accurate and transparent information is provided to potential domestic and international students. Most institutions have a strategy to increase international student numbers, and all parties must be aware that they are attending an international institution. Similarly, for courses with high Chinese international student numbers, the institution should ensure that Chinese students know this. They may feel their experience is not internationalised when 90% of their class might be Chinese.

6. The Student Experience Division should employ specialised international student experience consultants who research, develop and work with faculty, schools and departments to embed internationalisation into pedagogy, administration, and academic support.

A professional doctorate includes a specific focus on how the research and thesis can impact and influence professional practice in an area of study; in this case, it is the internationalisation of the student experience. Professional services in a higher education institution can often feel like a third space, both seen and unseen. It is an under-researched area, as discussed in Section 2.6, pp. 56-58. Through this study, I wanted to acknowledge the role of professional services and highlight specific recommendations that we can take forward. The professional aspect of this study is embedded in understanding the experience of Chinese international master's students for the professional services of the Student Experience Division. I would encourage institutions to implement a more comprehensive programme of intercultural fluency that addresses not just Chinese students but how the international and home student communities are perceived. I would encourage institutions to broaden their scope and see that the institution itself also needs to integrate with its community, which is neither pre-determined nor static.

Chapter 9 Recommendations and Considerations for Future Research

This study has provided insights into the lived experiences of Chinese international master's students studying in UK higher education. However, it has also revealed additional gaps and areas where further research can be considered. This chapter addresses those gaps and provides recommendations and considerations for further research.

The first recommendation for further research is to use the theory of 'being and becoming' as presented in this study to the lived experiences of other students studying for a master's degree, different country contexts, and geographical areas. Through the conceptual lens of *Bildung* and the theoretical framework of 'being and becoming', one may develop the field of research further to understand the experiences of the international student community. In addition, it would be valuable to consider how an in-depth study such as this would be of interest across multiple population samples and via a comparative study. 'Being and becoming' can be viewed differently in terms of transition and transformation respective to the different degree levels of study, where degree length can range from three to seven years. In comparison, a master's programme lasts only one year, which lends itself to the scope of time and place for a transformative experience.

Looking at the transitional experience, a research question that would be interesting to delve into is the identity of students studying different degree levels of study. How do they identify themselves in the academic sojourn? Anecdotally and from statements made by participants in this study, it would be apt to question whether international undergraduate students identify themselves more as international students or students of their degree field. The findings in this study indicate that international master's students identify first and foremost as international students, with their subject area as a lesser identifier.

One limitation present in this study was that only female participants volunteered during the participant recruitment process; ideally, this would have been a study encompassing both genders, and future research could aim to do so. This limitation could be addressed in a call for volunteers and research participants specifically aimed at those who identify as male. Additionally, I would like to undertake a more in-depth longitudinal study encompassing 'being and becoming' in international student transition and transformation. I would structure the study over several years, beginning before a student moved to the UK, and continuing during their studies, then post-study, and possibly across different degree levels. A study of this form could provide significant insights into the student journey from inception to completion and provide the basis for mapping the student experience of international students.

Post-study work in this project has identified an area that also addressed a gap in the field. A new immigration route to work in the UK, the Graduate Route visa, was implemented in July 2021. Would this new immigration route affect student choices and motivations for studying and staying in the UK post-study? As Mai discussed, this would not be an option for her because of her established career in China, and UK companies could not offer her the same salary or career progression as returning to China. Yiwen, on the other hand, described this as being of significant interest to her, and if possible, without the current barriers, she would consider this as part of her plan post-study.

An additional area of research that several studies have focused on but that could be addressed further is how home students view international students and home students' perspectives of an increased internationalisation strategy in UK higher education. For example, what does internationalisation mean to home students, and do they consider it when choosing where to study?

In addition, I would suggest that further research is required from the perspective of professional services. For example, how do professional service colleagues perceive Chinese international master's students specifically and international students in general? I would recommend that this research be undertaken before and after

divisional restructuring to map the student journey in more depth, as seen by professional services colleagues in the Student Experience Division.

As discussed above, there is scope in the field of international students that can still be addressed. This study highlighted gaps where knowledge and research could be developed to harness a more descriptive and encompassing picture of the international student experience. A critical area to look at is the future of the internationalisation of higher education across the sector. How could a culture shift in the sector and institutions pave the way for increased development of internationalisation strategies? These internationalisation strategies would encompass the holistic lived experiences of the student community. As mentioned in the recommendations above, this would need to incorporate more in-depth studies across various populations.

In Chapter 10, I conclude this study by summarising the theoretical conclusions, reflecting on the past eighteen months of the coronavirus pandemic and future uncertainties in the higher education sector.

Chapter 10 Conclusion

"I am very proud."

Akira, Interview 3

It is daunting to come to this stage of the thesis, the culmination of years of work and study. The final chapter of this thesis concludes this research and the fulfilment of the EdD programme and is divided into four sections. The first clarifies the contribution to knowledge and summarises the theoretical conclusions. Section 10.2 reflects on how I can take this research further and provides suggestions and recommendations for other institutional areas outside of Student Experience. Section 10.3 briefly discusses the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on the future of Chinese students studying in the UK and the overall higher education sector. My final thoughts in Section 10.4 conclude the thesis. The conclusions presented are underpinned by the rationale for this study and the methodology discussed in Chapter 4, that the aim of this study is not to generalise but to use the case study narrative accounts to better understand Chinese international master's students and their experiences.

10.1 Contribution to knowledge

This study has made a direct and new contribution to knowledge in developing a theoretical perspective of 'being and becoming' for Chinese international master's students. This new strand of theory provides a holistic framework that one can use to understand the perspectives and experiences of Chinese international students. We can use 'being and becoming' as the English language equivalent to *Bildung*, providing the same essence of education, transformation, and cultivation, with no fixed endpoint. I would also propose that 'being and becoming' is a theoretical perspective that can be used in research across varying cohorts of international students to gain insight into the development of the self. In Chapter 2, I highlighted a gap in the field to address a holistic perspective of the Chinese international student that can delve deeper

into their motivations, perceptions, and experiences. Through this thesis, I have closed this gap by using 'being and becoming' to demonstrate the connections between the students and their visions of an imagined future self that, through education and undertaking a master's degree overseas, becomes real.

This thesis has shown that we can view the Chinese international master's student experience as holistic and transformative through theorising 'being and becoming'. Through their academic sojourn, they unearth their present selves and act on becoming their imagined future selves. This is 'being and becoming' through the academic sojourn, learning through their studies, and living in a country that is not their home. Using the findings of this study through the conceptual lens of *Bildung* as 'being and becoming', we can see that educative practices and motivation as investment lead students to feel empowered with a sense of freedom and belonging. The participants in this study clearly showed that the outcomes of having a master's degree in the UK propelled them to choose to study at a UK higher education institution; however, their transformation was grounded in their lived experience. This experience and transformation are pivotal as they demonstrate the value, impact and importance of an academic sojourn overseas. When we look at the internationalisation strategies of higher education institutions, it must be the lived experience that is considered when reaching out to international students and not solely what they will learn in the classroom or lecture theatre.

The findings of this study demonstrate how the professional services of the Student Experience Division can implement cultural changes at an institutional level that will support Chinese international master's students and may benefit the overall international student community. As discussed in the literature in Section 2.3, pp. 46-47, there has been a historical perspective that international students who come to study in the UK must amalgamate into the higher education institution. However, as the findings from this study demonstrate, Chinese international master's students may not need to amalgamate more than they already do, as this is something they expect they will have to do. It may be that other institution members, staff, and students must work on how they coalesce into an international community.

In the context of my professionalism and facilitating a holistic experience for students, developing the student experience in the Student Experience Division, I see the potential and scope for my role as student engagement officer (international). There is ample opportunity to take the recommendations suggested in Section 8.2, pp. 169-170 to enhance and develop the international student experience and how it is perceived in higher education institutions. I will take action from this research and the insights presented by the narratives of this study to build and develop an intercultural fluency programme for staff and students. I will also take action to lobby the Student Experience Division to provide additional support to their staff and students to see the international student community for the rich knowledge and experience they bring to an institution.

10.2 Moving forward: impact and importance

As with any piece of research, the question is always what comes next or where the research can be used. As discussed in Section 8.2, pp. 169-170, and Section 10.1 above, I can implement the outcomes of this research in my professional practice and in the Student Experience Division to negotiate actions to take forward. However, the implications of the findings of the study do not necessarily need to stop there. Considerations from the findings can be discussed at a school level.

Additionally, colleagues from different areas of a higher education institution may see insights that directly affect their area as student experience is discussed at a school and faculty level. Furthermore, colleagues working with the identities of our student community may find a discussion of the development of the self through a theory of 'being and becoming' appropriate for their area of work. In Section 10.2.1 below, I make additional recommendations to areas of the institution outside of the Student Experience Division.

10.2.1 Recommendations outside the Student Experience Division

For the institution:

1. There is a significant divide in the relationships between home and international students, and specific to Chinese international students, this needs to be addressed. In addition, as recommended in Section 8.2.1, pp. 169-170 and above, support needs to be increased for domestic students, preparing domestic home students for a campus that is international in its community.

2. Schools and faculty also need to foster an increased sense of belonging for their Chinese international master's students, ensuring that their international master's student community feels a sense of identity with their school or faculty as much as their identity as an international student.

For academic staff:

1. To provide consistency in the level of experience across domestic and international students, considering that international students and, as expressly stated in this study, Chinese international master's students may require additional support, providing this support would create an equitable experience.

For student's union colleagues:

1. Incorporating the findings of this study and the importance of a holistic student experience for Chinese international students, providing additional advocacy, and lobbying higher education institutions can provide more equitable support for Chinese international students with their academic studies.

10.2.2 Dissemination of findings

On submission and completion of this thesis as the fulfilment of my EdD, I will disseminate this study and its findings to the leadership and colleagues of the Student Experience Division to consider and possibly implement the recommendations suggested in Section 8.2, pp. 169-170 and Section 10.2.1. In addition, I will disseminate the findings from this study to the various student advocacy groups I am involved in as a Student Engagement Officer (International), such as the international student forum, the Race Equality Charter, and the University of Sanctuary. Since this is a professional doctoral thesis to develop professional practice, the above dissemination is most important to me. I would then submit this work for publication and present it at conferences on student experience, particularly the UK Council for International Student Affairs annual conference.

10.3 The coronavirus pandemic

While I was finishing my data collection and writing this thesis, the global Covid-19 pandemic broke out. This study does not answer how higher education institutions manage the possible fallout, if any, from this crisis. However, it has raised several questions and provided food for thought about the future of higher education institutions and their recruitment of international students.

Covid-19 rapidly changed the landscape for higher education institutions for the academic years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 and may continue to change this landscape for the following academic years. In 2020/2021, we saw international students studying their master's degree programmes remotely from their home countries, and some universities opened additional entry points for specific programmes, for example, in January 2021. This highlights questions about what receiving an education in another country means for a student. It also brings us to continue the simmering debate about what higher education is, what higher education institutions are for, and whether they can exist online in the same way they do for students who choose to go and study in another country. It highlights questions about finances and revenue as international students bring so much to the national and local economies and a higher education institution's economy. How could an institution move into the future if it could not recruit as many students from China and other countries as it did in the past?

There is the opportunity and potential to take this time to see what potential appetite there may be from international students and Chinese international master's students for online master's programmes. However, given the findings in this study and the importance of the sojourn experience, this may be a challenge. As the participants of this study described, the experience of being in the UK is as much about living in the UK as it is about academic studies. It is about the freedom and independence they encounter. It is about the life choices they make after this experience. It is about the interactions they have with others, both social and educational. They would not have the same lived experience of studying abroad, would only receive the pedagogy of an international programme, and might not experience the transformative experience of 'being and becoming.'

The last few years have been a challenging time of uncertainty for the higher education sector. There are thoughts that the UK may not present itself as an attractive option for international students. Furthermore, as EU/EEA/Swiss students will be classed as international for their fee status going forward, the EU/EEA/Swiss student population may decline in the coming years. However, there are still predictions of increased international student markets as the economies of certain countries progress; India is one example. Furthermore, implementing a two-year post-study work visa could counteract the negative impact on international student recruitment that Covid-19 had on the academic year 2020/2021, and the higher education sector in the UK could see a reawakening in the face of substantial adversity. Only time will tell.

10.4 Final thoughts

As mentioned in Chapter 9, there is scope for how this study can be developed and the findings applied to other studies. What I hope has come through in this thesis is the voice of the participants. They are the centre and essence of this study, discussing their experiences and being heard and their voices shared. This study has presented a rich and descriptive account of Chinese international master's students and their lived experiences studying and living in the UK. Through the conceptual lens of *Bildung*, this thesis has developed a branch of theory called 'being and becoming' for Chinese international master's students.

This thesis has shown that 'being and becoming' can be used as an English equivalent to *Bildung* to understand the transformative experience of Chinese international master's students. Chinese international master's students' journeys involve self-development, freedom, and emancipation through educative practices and the becoming of their imagined future selves. The findings of this thesis and the theoretical contribution to the field of knowledge provide the potential and opportunity to use 'being and becoming' as *Bildung* for additional international student cohorts across an institution and the higher education sector.

My final thoughts are to embrace the rich and descriptive stories these participants told of their lived experiences. The stories told in this thesis are as in-depth and rich in content as the students who chose to study in the UK. By listening and understanding this experience, we can develop our institutions, shift the culture, embrace internationalisation in all its forms, and acknowledge that a master's programme overseas is a transformational experience of a student's 'being and becoming'.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Form and Approval including Information Sheet and Consent Form

Institute of Education

UCL

Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute of Education (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in simple terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

Registering your study with the UCL Data Protection Officer as part of the UCL Research Ethics Review Process

If you are proposing to collect personal data i.e. data from which a living individual can be identified **you must be registered with the UCL Data Protection Office before you submit your ethics application for review**. To do this, email the complete ethics form to data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. Once your registration number is received, add it to the form* and submit it to your supervisor for approval.

If the Data Protection Office advises you to make changes to the way in which you propose to collect and store   the data this should be reflected in your ethics application form.

Section 1 Project details		
a.	Project title	The self-formation of Chinese international master's students in UK higher education

b.	Student name and ID number (e.g. ABC12345678)	
c.	***UCL Data Protection Registration Number**	No Z6364106/2018/12/04 Date issued: 03/12/2018
c.	Supervisor/Personal Tutor	
d.	Department	IoE Culture, Communication and Media

e.	Course category (Tick one)	PhD ☐	EdD ☒
		DEdPsy ☐	

f.	**If applicable,** state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.	
g.	Intended research start date	December 2018
h.	Intended research end date	January 2020
i.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in *If research to be conducted abroad please check www.fco.gov.uk and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be* ***required*** *before ethical approval can be granted: http://ioe-net.inst.ioe.ac.uk/about/profservices/international/Pages/default.aspx*	United Kingdom

j.	Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?	
	Yes ☐	External Committee Name:
	No ☒ ⇨ *go to Section 2*	Date of Approval:

If yes:
- − Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.

- − Proceed to Section 10 Attachments**.**

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

Section 2 Research methods summary (tick all that apply)

☒ Interviews
☐ Focus groups
☐ Questionnaires
☐ Action research
☐ Observation
☐ Literature review

☐ Controlled trial/other intervention study
☐ Use of personal records
☐ Systematic review ⇨ *if only method used go to Section 5.*
☐ Secondary data analysis ⇨ *if secondary analysis used go to Section 6.*
☐ Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups
☒ Other, give details:
Personal documents, diary entries that will be discussed during the interview.

Please provide an overview of the project, focusing on your methodology. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, data collection (including justifications for methods chosen and description of topics/questions to be asked), reporting and dissemination. Please focus on your methodology; the theory, policy, or literary background of your work can be provided in an attached document (i.e. a full research proposal or case for support document). *Minimum 150 words required.*

This study aims to explore the self-formation of Chinese international master's students through a case study of four students studying at a higher education institution in the UK. This research study follows a qualitative paradigm and will use semi-structured interviews and reflective diary entries for data collection. The participants in this study will be four Chinese international students who are studying for a masters degree at a university in the south-east of the UK. Of the four participants two will have had an unconditional offer to study and come through direct entry, and two will have received a conditional offer and completed a pre-sessional English course prior to their masters degree.

Research Questions:

1. What is the self-formation of Chinese international master's students in UK higher education?
2. How is the self-formation of Chinese international students understood in relation to their identity and imagined future self?
3. Is there a comparison to be made in the self-formation of Chinese international students who enter UK higher education through different pathways?

Objectives:

➢ To explore the self-formation of Chinese international master's student in UK higher education.
➢ To explore the different pathways into postgraduate studies in UK higher education and whether this has an impact on the self-formation of Chinese international students.

Sampling and Recruitment

The participants in this study will be four Chinese international master's students. Two participants will have undertaken a pre-sessional course prior to their masters degree and two participants will not. The participants will be two male and two female and of a similar age, and will study in the same school of study at the higher education institution. However, this may vary depending on the students who volunteer to participate. I will recruit participants through a request for volunteers in the university Business School, Language Centre, the student bulletin, and on social media. I will offer participants an incentive to participate – a twenty pound Amazon voucher per interview.

Pilot

Using similar methods of recruitment, I will undertake a pilot interview for this study. To pilot this study, test the interview questions, and mode of data analysis, I will interview a participant that will not be part of the subsequent research. This participant will also be a Chinese international student who has completed their masters programme and can be either a student who entered university through direct entry or with a conditional offer.

Data Collection

The methods for data collection are semi-structured interviews and reflective diary entries. The diary entries can take a written, audio, video, picture/photo or digital form, whichever the participants feel most comfortable with. The format and design of the interviews are to follow the exploratory nature of the study and its iterative process. The interviews will be semi-structured and flexible to allow for input from the participants and for the questions to be asked relative to the responses given. The participants will be asked to bring their reflective diary entries for discussion during the interview, these diary entries will be analysed post-interview.

There will be three interviews over the course of one year:

4. 1st Interview: In December of the first semester of their course.
5. 2nd Interview: In June, post examinations and when students will be working on their dissertation.
6. 3rd Interview: In December, after they have completed their dissertation, they will have most likely received their master's degree result, and may have decided or taken the next step in their life. Depending on whether they are still in the UK this interview may take place via skype/ WeChat/ QQ.

The interviews will be transcribed using Trint.com; this is a transcription software tool, no data will be stored in it. This tool will provide an initial transcription which I can re-transcribe to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Data Analysis

I will analyse the data using narrative analysis. I will use NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis software to carry out my data analysis, any data stored in NVivo will be anonymised, and the Nvivo software will be password protected on a personal computer.

Section 3 Research Participants (tick all that apply)

☐ Early years/pre-school ☐ Ages 5-11 ☐ Ages 12-16 ☐ Young people aged 17-18	☒ Adults *please specify below* ☐ Unknown – specify below ☐ No participants International postgraduate taught students at a UK HEI

> **NB:** Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC).

Section 4 Security-sensitive material (only complete if applicable)

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call;   involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

		Yes	No
a.	Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?	☐ *	☐
b.	Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?	☐ *	☐
c.	Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?	☐ *	☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

Section 5 Systematic reviews of research (only complete if applicable)

a.	Will you be collecting any new data from participants?	Yes ☐ *	No ☐
b.	Will you be analysing any secondary data?	Yes ☐ *	No ☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) **and** if you have answered **No** to both questions, please go to **Section 8 Attachments**.*

Section 6 Secondary data analysis (only complete if applicable)

a.	Name of dataset/s	
b.	Owner of dataset/s	
		Yes ☐ No ☐

c.	Are the data in the public domain?		**If no,** *do you have the owner's permission/license?* Yes ☐ No* ☐
d.	Are the data anonymised?	Yes ☐	No ☐
		Do you plan to anonymise the data? Yes ☐ No* ☐	
		Do you plan to use individual level data? Yes* ☐ No ☐	
		Will you be linking data to individuals? Yes* ☐ No ☐	

e.	Are the data sensitive ([DPA 1998 definition](#))?	Yes* ☐	No ☐
f.	Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?	Yes ☐	No* ☐
g.	**If no,** was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?	Yes ☐	No* ☐
h.	**If no,** was data collected prior to ethics approval process?	Yes ☐	No* ☐

* *Give further details in* **Section 8 Ethical Issues**   *If secondary analysis is only method used* **and** *no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to* **Section 9 Attachments.**

Section 7 Data Storage and Security

Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

a.	**Data subjects -** Who will the data be collected from? Human adult participants – international postgraduate taught (master's) students
b.	**What data will be collected?** Please provide details of the type of personal data to be collected Personal data such as age, gender, nationality, hometown, master's course title, and whether they attended a pre-sessional course will be collected.
c.	**Disclosure** – Who will the results of your project be disclosed to? Pseudonymised results of this project will be disclosed to my colleagues, in my thesis, and in future research articles.

d.	**Data storage** – Please provide details on how and where the data will be stored i.e. UCL network, encrypted USB stick*, encrypted laptop* etc. The data will be stored on a private personal computer, files will be encrypted and password protected. Pseudonymised data will be stored in Nvivo which I will store on the same personal password-protected computer. *Advanced Encryption Standard 256 bit encryption which has been made a security standard within the NHS

e.	**Data Safe Haven (Identifiable Data Handling Solution)** – Will the personal identifiable data collected and processed as part of this research be stored in the UCL Data Safe Haven (mainly used by SLMS divisions, institutes and departments)?	Yes ☐ No ☒

f.	How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format? The data collected in this project will be kept and stored for 10 years after completion of this research project. It will be stored in electronic format, the electronic files will be encrypted and password protected. They will be stored on a password protected personal computer. Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area? (If yes, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with the DPA 1998 and state what these arrangements are: No Will data be archived for use by other researchers? (If yes, please provide details.) No

Section 8 Ethical issues

Please state clearly the ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research and how will they be addressed.

All issues that may apply should be addressed. Some examples are given below, further information can be found in the guidelines. *Minimum 150 words required.*	
- Methods - Sampling - Recruitment - Gatekeepers - Informed consent - Potentially vulnerable participants - Safeguarding/child protection - Sensitive topics	- International research - Risks to participants and/or researchers - Confidentiality/Anonymity - Disclosures/limits to confidentiality - Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection) - Reporting - Dissemination and use of findings

I am undertaking this research for my doctorate thesis and as such will follow the ethical guidelines and procedures set forth by UCL Institute of Education (2018), ESRC Ethics framework (2015), and BERA (2011), and in consultation with those of the research institution.

1. **Volunteerism and the right to withdraw** – Participants taking part in this study will do so on a voluntary basis, there will be no expectation that any student has to take part and if during the duration of the research project they no longer wish to take part they may withdraw at any time. If a participant takes part in one or more interviews but chooses to withdraw before the research study is complete, then the data collected from the will be deleted and not included in the research study.

2. **Informed consent** – Participants will receive an information sheet and consent form, on reading the information sheet and discussing the research project with me the researcher where participants will have the opportunity to ask any questions related to the research project. I will ask the participants to complete the consent form. The consent form will be scanned and filed a password protected personal computer and the original consent form will then be destroyed in confidential waste.

3. **Confidentiality/ Anonymity** – The identity of the participants will be kept pseudonymous; however identifying characteristics such as age, gender, nationality, and their hometown will be included in the thesis.

4. **Disclosures/ limits to confidentiality** – In the information sheet I will outline the limitations to confidentiality and if I believe that a participant is in some way at harm from themselves or others I have a responsibility to report this. Additionally, if a participant discloses any breaches to their Tier 4 visa status, I must inform the Home Office.

5. **No harm to the participants** - I am aware of the psychological impact taking part may have - there may be sensitivities with regards to the topic, such as homesickness, loneliness, self-esteem, and financial hardship that the students may discuss. I will make available information on the well-being and support services provided by the higher education institution.

6. **Insider research** – As I am an employee at the institution where I will undertake this research project, there are issues related to insider research. I work in the International Student Support Office and have access to students' records. I will follow due diligence and keep the research data separate from my everyday work. Part of my role is on a front desk reception where international students often come to ask questions with regards to welfare and support. I will discuss with the participants that they are free to come and talk to me there, but that their visit to the International Student Support Office will have no impact on my research data, or vice versa, that taking part in my research will have no impact on the service their receive.

7. **Research at an external institution to UCL** – I am undertaking this research at a higher education institution external to UCL. I have contacted the Research Committee for this institution and have been instructed on completion of my ethics review submitted to, and granted by UCL, to then present this ethics review form to the Research Committee. I will include relevant communications with the Research Committee as an appendix in my thesis.

8. **Recruitment** – Participants will be recruited at the higher education institution external to UCL. I will put a call out for volunteers through social media, the student bulletin, the university Business School, and language centre of the university where international students undertake their pre-sessional course.

9. **Data storage and protection** – Data will be stored and used through NVivo Qualitative Software on double password protected personal computer of which no others have access. Files on the same password-protected computer will be encrypted using AES Crypt. The encrypted data will be stored to the end of this research plus ten years as mentioned in UCL's Records Retention Schedule.

10. **Sensitivity to the participants** – The participants will be speakers of English as a second/foreign/other language. I will approach the interview with patience and sensitivity that they may have difficulty expressing themselves and may wish to use a translating device such as Google Translate, bring a dictionary, or use pen and paper.

11. **No impact on academic records** - There will be no academic benefit from taking part in the study with regards to the students' grades, nor will it be noted on their academic record that they took part

in the study. However, by the nature of the study, students discussing their perspectives and experiences the reflective process may affect their motivation, and on how they then perceive their academic performance which then, in turn, could affect their academic performance.

12. **Use of an incentive** – Due to the nature and longitudinal process of this research project: taking part in multiple interviews over the course of a year, I have decided that an incentive would be appropriate. I will give each participant an Amazon voucher worth twenty pounds per interview, and provide tea/coffee/ refreshments during the interview.

13. **Responsibility to the researcher** – The research outlined for this study will be written up for my doctoral thesis as part of the Ed.D programme. In undertaking this research, I will ensure that the data is collected in a safe space and that no harm will come to me, the researcher. If I am told information that I find inappropriate, I will ensure that the procedural channels are followed as outlined in the higher education institution's student handbook. In the process of this study, I will keep a research diary to record the rationale for decisions made and my own personal thoughts, feelings and experiences of this research project.

14. **Responsibility to the institution** - The research will not be used as a performance tool for the higher education institution. I will anonymise the HEI in the study, and the only identifying characteristic will be it's location in the south-east of the UK.

15. **Responsibility to the academic community** - This project will be undertaken with transparency and rigour concerning the academic community of which the participants, the researcher and higher education institution are members.

16. **Location** – The location of the interview will be at a time and place convenient to the participant. I will offer suggestions such as a classroom or quiet space on campus.

17. **Reporting, dissemination and use of findings** – The findings from this research study will be reported in my thesis as fulfilment of the Ed.D. I will also disseminate the findings to my colleagues in the International Student Support office and use the findings as part of

professional development training given to university staff members on cross-cultural awareness. There may be scope and possibility to use insights from the study to develop an online course that may aid students in transitioning to UK academic culture. I also intend to publish these findings in research journals focusing on international students and their experience of UK higher education, and present at relevant conferences.

Section 9 Attachments Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached

		Yes	No
a.	Information sheets, consent forms and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research *(List attachments below)*	☒	☐
	If applicable/appropriate:		
b.	Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee	Yes ☒	

c.	The proposal ('case for support') for the project	Yes ☒
d.	Full risk assessment	Yes ☐

Section 10 Declaration

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information in this form is correct and that this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of this project.

I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.
Yes ☒   No ☐

I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.
Yes ☒   No ☐

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:

The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.

Name	Eileen Laffan
Date	04/12/2018

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor for review.

Notes and references

Professional code of ethics

You should read and understand relevant ethics guidelines, for example:

British Psychological Society (2009) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*, and (2014) *Code of Human Research Ethics*

or

British Educational Research Association (2011) *Ethical Guidelines*

or

British Sociological Association (2002) *Statement of Ethical Practice*

Please see the respective websites for these or later versions; direct links to the latest versions are available on the Institute of Education http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research/research-ethics

Disclosure and Barring Service checks

If you are planning to carry out research in regulated Education environments such as Schools, or if your research will bring you into contact with children and young people (under the age of 18), you will need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) CHECK, before you start. The DBS was previously known as the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) . If you do not already hold a current DBS check, and have not registered with the DBS update service, you will need to obtain one through at IOE.

Ensure that you apply for the DBS check in plenty of time as will take around 4 weeks, though can take longer depending on the circumstances.

Further references

The www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk website is very useful for assisting you to think through the ethical issues arising from your project.

Robson, Colin (2011). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers* (3rd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

This text has a helpful section on ethical considerations.

Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook.* London: Sage.

This text has useful suggestions if you are conducting research with children and young people.

Wiles, R. (2013) What are Qualitative Research Ethics? Bloomsbury.

A useful and short text covering areas including informed consent, approaches to research ethics including examples of ethical dilemmas.

Departmental use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, the supervisor **must** refer the application to the Department Research Ethics Coordinator (via ioe.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk so that it can be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A departmental research ethics coordinator or representative can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the REC. If unsure please refer to the guidelines explaining when to refer the ethics application to the IOE Research Ethics Committee, posted on the committee's website.

Student name	Eileen Laffan
Student department	Department of Culture, Communication and Media
Course	EdD
Project title	The self-formation of Chinese international master's students in UK higher education
Reviewer 1	
Supervisor/first reviewer name	Dina Mehmedbegovic
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?	All ethical issues are appropriately explored.
Supervisor/first reviewer signature	

Date	12.11.2018.
Reviewer 2	
Second reviewer name	John Gray
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?	I foresee no ethical problems with this research
Supervisor/second reviewer signature	
Date	12/11/2018
Decision on behalf of reviews	

Decision	Approved	X ☐
	Approved subject to the following additional measures	☐
	Not approved for the reasons given below	☐
	Referred to REC for review	☐

Points to be noted by other reviewers and in report to REC	
Comments from reviewers for the applicant	

Once it is approved by both reviewers, students should submit their ethics application form to the Centre for Doctoral Education team: IOE.CDE@ucl.ac.uk.

Institute of Education

UCL

'The self-formation of Chinese international master's students in UK higher education'

December 2018 ~ January 2020

Information sheet

Who is conducting the research?

My name is **Eileen Laffan,** and I am inviting you to take in part in an empirical research study that will be the basis for my Ed.D doctorate thesis at UCL Institute of Education. I am a student of UCL Institute of Education and a Student Experience staff member at the University of Sussex.

This study will address the self-formation of Chinese international master's students studying at a UK higher education institution. Self-formation looks at the journey of the student as they come to study in the UK, their motivations and decisions, addressing ideas of the self as the student moves through their masters course, and, on completion of their degree who they feel they are and who they have become, and the possibility of who they might be in the future. By undertaking this project I hope to explore the experiences, opinions, and identity of Chinese international students who are studying a postgraduate master's degree. I have experience in undertaking research interviews; I have interviewed students for the pilot of this study, in modules on the Ed.D programme, for an Institution Focused Study, and for my Master's dissertation.

If you do wish to take part, you will receive an Amazon voucher to the value of twenty pounds for each interview you take part in as a thank you for giving your time to this research study.

I very much hope that you would like to take part. This information sheet will try and answer questions you might have about the project, but please don't hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you would like to know.

Why are we doing this research?

Chinese international students represent the largest proportion of the international student community in the UK, in addition, the greatest number of Chinese international students come to the UK to study for a master's degree.

This study is being undertaken in order to explore a better understanding of the Chinese international student, the journey the student goes through in pursuing their masters degree, and addressing how UK higher education institutions can better facilitate Chinese international master's students and their studying experience.

Why am I being invited to take part?

You have been asked to take part as you are an international Chinese student who has experience of coming to the UK to study a master's course, and have either entered the university with an unconditional or conditional offer and have completed a pre-sessional English course.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

- Participation will involve being interviewed; in the interview, you will answer questions about your experiences of coming to study at a UK university: reasons and decisions for doing so, choice of university course, friendships, life while living in the UK, the next steps you will take after completing your masters degree. If you have undertaken a pre-sessional course, there will also be questions about that course, your expectations of it, and if it has had an impact on you with regards to preparation for your master's degree.
- There will be three interviews during the course of a year from December 2018 to January 2019: these will take place in December 2018, June 2019, and December 2019. The interviews will last approximately 60 minutes and will take place at a time and location convenient to you.
- The interviews will be recorded using a recording application on my smartphone; the recordings will then be saved on a password protected personal computer of which no others have access, on completion of the project they will be destroyed.
- You will be asked to record diary entries during the year from December 2018 – December 2019. These diary entries can be used to records critical incidents and moments during your sojourn in the UK. They will be discussed during the interview and analysed post-interview. The diary entries can take any form you wish: written, video, audio, or picture/photo form.
- After the interviews are finished, and the diary entries collected, you are not required to do anything.

Will anyone know I have been involved?

Your personal information will not be revealed to others outside of the study. In order to respect your privacy and confidentiality; your real name will not be

used in the data collection process; you will pseudonymised in all transcripts, data, and the written doctorate thesis.

Could there be problems for me if I take part?

This study will be addressing your feelings, experiences, and opinion of moving to the UK to study. Sensitive issues may arise during the interview, if at any point you feel uncomfortable and you would no longer wish to continue then you are free to do so. Taking part in this study will be organised around your study schedule, and will not affect your academic records.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The findings of the study will form the empirical research as part a doctorate thesis for the UCL Institute of Education Ed.D programme. The findings will be discussed with colleagues at the University of Sussex for professional development and may be included in research papers submitted for publication. The data collected for this project will be stored digitally for approximately ten years on a password protected personal computer. Your identity will remain anonymous though-out this time; if you wish I will discuss the results and findings of this project with you and the final thesis will be available for you to read.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is completely voluntary; you are free to decline to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, without experiencing any disadvantage or harm. I hope that if you do choose to be involved, then you will find it a valuable experience.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. UCL's Data Protection Officer can also be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found here: www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/participants-health-and-care-research-privacy-notice

The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data will be performance of a task in the public interest.

and for research purposes if sensitive information is collected.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would lie to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, you can reach me at eileen.laffan.15@ucl.ac.uk.

If you would like take part please email me at eileen.laffan.15@ucl.ac.uk

This project has been reviewed and approved by UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee Ref No Z6364106/2018/12/04.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information.

Institute of Education

'The self-formation of Chinese international master's students in UK higher education'
December 2018 – January 2020
Consent Form

	(tick as appropriate)
I confirm that I have read and understood this information sheet, and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these questions adequately answered.	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	☐
I know that I can refuse to answer any or all of the questions and that I can withdraw from the interview at any point.	☐
I agree for the interview to be recorded, and that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I agree to record diary entries and for those diary entries to be discussed in the interview and collected for data analysis. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	☐
I agree that small direct quotes may be used in reports (these will be pseudonymised).	☐
I understand that in exceptional circumstances anonymity and confidentiality would have to be broken, for example, if it was felt that myself or others are at harm, if there are concerns regarding professional misconduct, and as a tier 4 visa holder if I disclose any breaches to my tier 4 status.	☐
I understand that the results of this study will be shared as part of a doctorate thesis, and that other genuine researcher	☐

may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.	
Name:…………………………………………………………

Signature: …………………………………… Date: ……………..……..

Name of researcher:………..……………….…..…………………….…

Signature: ……………………………………. Date: …………………….. | |

Appendix 2: Research Committee

RE: Ethics procedure for staff studying at a different institution

Thu 06/12/2018 15:22
To:
Cc:

Dear Eileen,

Many thanks for your email and for providing the necessary information and documentation.

I can confirm that there is no requirement for this to go through any ethical review process. The information provided is very detailed and clearly shows that it has been ethically approved by UCL.

We would simply recommend that you make your line manager aware.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries,

Kind regards

Appendix 3: Draft of the Interview Schedule

<u>Interview 1 –</u>

Thank you so much for taking part. If at any point you want me to stop recording, or you wish to withdraw from the study you can do so at any time, and you don't have to give any reason why. Just to check you are aware that this will be the first of three interviews?

I am going to ask you some questions about your background, previous school and university life, reasons for coming to study in the UK, your expectations of studying in the UK, and your feelings about studying in the UK now. Please answer as freely and openly as you would like and feel comfortable doing.

Firstly can you tell me about yourself?

Tell me about your studying background? Where you come from? Your high school, university, and undergraduate degree?

Why did you choose to study in the UK? Why did you choose this university?

How did/do your family, friends feel about you coming to study in the UK?

How do you feel about coming to the UK?

What were your expectations of coming to study at this university?

If studied a pre-sessional English course

Did you study a pre-sessional English course? If yes, can you tell me about your experiences of the course?

Thinking back to the pre-sessional programme, do you feel that it has helped you to study your Master's programme? Were you satisfied with the pre-sessional course? If yes, in what ways do you think so?

Do you keep in touch with your friends from the pre-sessional programme?

Do you have friends on your degree programme? If yes, how did you meet or make these friends?

Are you experiencing any challenges or issues on your degree programme?

Can you tell me about your university life?

We will finish there. Is there anything else you would like to add?

I want to say thank you again for taking part in this interview. And I hope you feel comfortable to take part in the second interview. I have your email I will contact you in June to schedule the second interview. I will turn off the recorder now.

Interview 2 - The questions for the second interview will set out on reflection of the data collected in the first interview. I have provided some opening questions.

Thank you so much again for taking part in my study. If at any point you want me to stop recording, or you wish to withdraw from the study you can do so at any time, and you don't have to give any reason why. This is the second of the three interviews.

 I will ask you about your current Master's programme, your university life, and your experiences of studying and living in the UK. Again please answer as freely and openly as you would like and feel comfortable doing

How are your studies?

Can you tell me about your life in the UK?

We will finish there. Is there anything else you would like to add?

I want to say thank you again for taking part in this interview. And I hope you feel comfortable to take part in the second interview. I have your email I will contact you in June to schedule the second interview. I will turn off the recorder now.

Interview 3 - Similar to interview 2, the questions for this interview will be based off the data collected in interview one and two.

Thank you so much again for taking part in my study. If at any point you want me to stop recording, or you wish to withdraw from the study you can do so at any time, and you don't have to give any reason why. This is the third of three interviews.

How do you feel now you have completed your studies?

Can you tell me how you would describe you experience of studying in the UK?

What are your plans for the future?

I want to say thank you again for taking part in this interview and my research study. I hope this has been a good experience for you. I will turn off the recorder now, and then I will debrief/tell you more about the study and my current findings. Also, if you would like a copy of the transcripts or the final report that I will give them to you, and if you have any questions please do feel free to contact me.

Appendix 4: Sample of Codes

Code		Code		Code	
M	Motivation	FL	Future Life	A	Self-awareness
PE	Past Experience	D	Determination	P	Profile
IF	Influence family	Pre-S	Pre-sessional course	HC	Making connections with home
IE	Influence education	LE	Living environment	RB	Religious belief or influence
FB	Family background	R	Relationships with others	EL	English language
EB	Educational background	S	Self	AC	Academic Culture
FL	Future Life	E	Education	UE	University environment
T	Transition	F	Friendship	C	Communication
ED	Emotional driver	CB	Cultural background	CA	Critical assessment
P-UK	Process to come to the UK	Fin	Finances	NE	New experience
FC	Career	EC	Educational capital	SF	Self-formation / becoming

Appendix 5: Sample of Transcripts

Akira – Interview Two

Akira [00:00:00] I'm so sorry.

Eileen [00:00:03] Today I just just I have had a headache and so I haven't been feeling very good today. So if I like what I'm talking I can't remember. What I said. I might ask a question and then I forgets it. I'm sorry. So. How are you.

Akira [00:00:25] I'm not bad. I just can say that.

Eileen [00:00:27] Yes. (Yeah). How have your studies been.

Akira [00:00:33] It's been. It's just so so because. This term I have very very less classes. I have just four hours one week Yeah. So I have a lot of free time.

Eileen [00:00:46] That's good. And how and how are your classes.

Akira [00:00:51] Good.

Eileen [00:00:52] They're good. (Yeah). Are they. I know last term in the first term you were finding some things were quite difficult. Yes. And how what how was that then.

Akira [00:01:05] Yeah. Last time you told me I can to More active to ask the tutor a lot of questions and I tried and the tutor also very kind and they reply me very detailed and this. Yeah. So I think yeah maybe I should. I find a good way to ask. Yeah and to. Settle the problem. So I'm very happy and I'm very proud of myself. I don't know why . I think I'm so great. I do some things that I never do do it before so I feel very good.

Eileen [00:01:48] Wonderful. Really good. (Yeah). And so have you found that Emailing and contacting your tutors Yes that was. That was okay. (Yeah. Yeah.) And they. And they were very they were kind.

Akira [00:02:04] Very kind They always encouraged me and so I make the time. So send that e-mail to them to ask for an appointment and they said OK. tell me the time the place and to talk with them and they give me a lot of advice so its very nice

Eileen [00:02:27] That's good. Wonderful. Yeah. And do you think that has helped your studies. (Yes) your grades and your assessment .

Akira [00:02:35] Yes. it also give me a lot. Confidence. Yes. And they told me that. Yeah. You are an international student so you don't ask yourself like a local speaker you can't and thats okay you just do this to us. yeah. You just try your best to study . So it's enough. Yes.

Eileen [00:02:56] Oh good. Yeah. And your assessments your assignment that you submitted. Yeah. How were they.

Akira [00:03:05] I just passed it. actually Yeah. I want to I know I I have a big. Big. Target. Yes. before I into the university but the fact is so so terrible so I I just to sort of said I'll just pass it . So it's enough. Yeah yeah yeah.

Eileen [00:03:38] Well that's the important part. Yeah. You passed. Yeah yeah. That is. I don't have to do any repeat or resit   or anything so that's good. Yeah it is. You tried your best. Yeah. And you know that you did. That's all it was. Yeah. I think it all sounds like it's going very well. Yeah. Yeah.

Annie – Interview One

Eileen: [00:19:22] And you got enough? (Yeah). So you didn't need to do a pre sessional program (No). You must have been happy about that. (Yeah yeah) Well only in terms of it was something less left to do and really ask a question in terms of funding financial funding if you don't mind me asking how are you funding to study in the UK?

Annie: [00:19:50] Where's my money come from? (Yes) It's from my parents.

Eileen: [00:19:54] Okay. And they've used the savings to give you to do this? (yes) OK. And how do you what do you think about that or feel about that?

Annie: [00:20:08] Sometimes I think I must do my best to do everything and cannot lose any time and use any time I can to improve myself during the one year because my parents give me all the money for me to study.

Eileen: [00:20:34] Do you think that later on in life and for a future date you will you see this as kind of like a loan as well that you will repay and give back to your parents?

Annie: [00:20:45] Yeah I think I will do that. That's not really not on the money. Yeah I think take a lot of time to spend is also a way to give back the money for them.

Eileen: [00:21:00] Okay. And with regards to your family while you're here do you feel that you miss them? Do you feel homesick? .

Annie: [00:21:12] Sometimes because I am very... I think I can do everything by myself. So just like when I feel I didn't do well int he exam I will feel homesick and I just want to see them.

Eileen: [00:21:35] Yeah okay. And have you any plans during your time here to go to travel home and to go back and see your parents.

Annie: [00:21:45] No they don't want me to go back. They are very busy.

Eileen: [00:21:50] Want you to stay here studying

Annie: [00:21:54] And I can travel around other countries, they think I don't need to use the time during only one year to go back to China, it is also a kind of wasted time.

Eileen: [00:22:10] And do you think when you when you told them you wanted to study abroad and come and do masters in the UK, what did they think how did they feel about that?

Annie: [00:22:24] They support me.

Eileen: [00:22:26] Do they think it's a good idea? (Yes). Yeah okay. And do you know why they?

Annie: [00:22:32] Firstly, it's about the university I studied in China is not as well as other universities that your friends children be in. (Okay) And secondly, they think it is only one year and they think I can learn a lot of things during such a short time.

Li – Interview Two

Li [00:24:34] You know what. There's a rumour in China that just like some country the reason that some country in some foreign country accept us is partly because of we pay much more than the local people just for interests. Especially for those university which didn't have very good reputation. Very low class (rank). Yeah right. Yeah.

Eileen [00:25:27] Where their rank is quite low. Yeah. So that's something that is going that's been talked about in China at the moment. (Yeah). And how. What do you think or feel about that. Do you think it's true.

Li [00:25:47] I think that for some university it is quite true. Of course the UK government need more money. It's normal. If we have the ability we would like to I ask the foreign students to come to China and if we can get more money from them it will be great But I still have to think about it positively It can be. Just think its just interaction of culture. (Yeah. Yeah). So it depends on people's opinion (people's perspective here for sure)

Eileen [00:26:59] And in terms of if I could ask about your motivation for other your other courses. So you mentioned the one module that you weren't interested in and so didn't want to take part. What about your other modules.

Li [00:27:15] There is one module that I am really into and which is called negotiation. (Oh yeah). Do you know that teacher.(I don't know the tutor no) OK. after his course I sent him emails and I said that I think that your course is the most useful class I have ever been to. (Oh great). Thank you so much for your. Yeah cause I it's really quite practical and I think I can really quite use it in my daily life or my future working life I think it's quite useful I didn't miss his class I didn't miss it.

Eileen [00:28:18] Yeah. Oh Great Yeah. Did you find his class was very kind of motivational. It is inspired you.

Li [00:28:28] Yeah. He asked. Yeah. Always asked us to do some practice like he will. Just like the role playing game.

Li [00:28:45] Yes. And you pretend to be a you pretend to be B. And you two guys. negogiate and you got the final results and we'll see what happened in

the progressand it is quite interesting. Yeah I can tell you that everyone is kind like his course

Eileen [00:29:09] Yeah it was quite good. And if I can ask So I'm thinking about our last meeting when you said about the job that. The fortune teller. (Yeah) Told you. You were going to be. Which was to work for a charity to maybe get funds

Li [00:29:29] . You know what. I went to see Gigi again Another time after the last meeting we have it we'll see about one month ago. (Yeah.) And it's quite interesting cos you know that I started my vlog (Yeah. Yeah) about at the end of February and just after three weeks or two weeks later. Someone asked me if I'd like to join them. (Oh wow)yeah. And um and I did ask my friend who is so how to say that big blogger. She got one thousand no (like a hundred thousand writing One more one. So one million) Yeah she got one million followers (oh wow)And she signed up company after her graduation. Where we come from the same the same university in the same class and we were good friends. And I asked her suggestion about whether I should join the company and she said that it better not to sign the company cause it will be you know just like you will have less freedom. You have to become the person they want you to be. And you have to share the benefits that you get. You will get 30 percent and the company will get 70 percent. of the fees of the advertisement fees. (Yes). but still the person who contacted me said that it is how it is attractive and we will make you become a big blogger in how many days. It's quite attractive for me. At the beginning. You know that I just started and they want to yeah It's just like. A meeting Just like that. And one of the companies they can offer salaries as well. (OK.) Yeah. It will be more you know stable. cause you know that blogger perhaps sometimes you can earn more but sometimes. Perhaps you have zero. Yeah. Yeah. So I don't know what to do and I went to ask GiGi(Oh yes.) What should I do. And so it was so amazing. I didn't say I'm doing the blogger but she know (OK.)

Li [00:33:57] And you know She has her card and the first one she just showed me and saying that you are doing something. How did she say creative independent. Just something like that. I don't Remember the words. (Yes). I was quite. Oh know. You know. You know everything about hey yeah. I was so scared. and she also said that it's about my family's. She said that you have a very good parents.They care a lot about you and so many good friends. It's true that they can ignore my how to say that disadvantage (your flaws.) Yeah yeah yeah. For so many years. I know that And she also said that she also said that I would not marry my boyfriend again.

Eileen [00:35:35] Okay.

Li [00:35:36] She said that again I was quite confused cause at that time my boyfriend. the relationship between us was quite good. She said that again. She said that I will marry someone perhaps rich. And she said my boyfriend is. She said that he's quite sweet but not the one you will want in the future. And I also asked her about my future life.because I remember that she said I will be in charity. I was quite confused about that point. because I didn't plan to going to a charity to work. (Yeah). And I asked her why did you say that I will going to a charity or something like that. And she answered me that I will not work in a charity but cause I'm doing the vlog and perhaps in the future when there's natural disaster in China I go there to make a video. And and she knows that I don't like writing things at all. I don't like. I hate dissertation. Yeah. And she says it's fine that you are doing video so that you don't have to write. You just have to record and you just have to communicate with other people so you don't worry about that. And you will record the video and then you will put that video into some she says about just like TV show just a television. (Yeah) yeah. Perhaps some television TV station or something like that. And that's that's why she said I will help others in the future.(OK.) she said that she explained that to me I can understand that now

Mai – Interview Three

Mai [00:07:56] I will make a comaprison comparison. . I will compare with the Chinese and the British firms and the Chinese law system and the Britain law system. Look and how I can take my knowledge to help their firms to develop more. better to develop better

Mai [00:08:28] You know especially in the technology. law system this is the weak point in the Chinese system and the most techonology firms worry about their.operations and their business whether their business. Corresponds with international rules. Yes. My responsibility is to Connect their business with the international circumstance

Eileen [00:09:15] And did you talk about If I can ask how your experience studying in the UK and working with people from many different countries and different, was that something that you talked about in the interview about how you could.

Mai [00:09:31] Yes. They asked me how I can communicate with foreigner people inlcuding the college the classmate and the tutors And I will introduce the difficulties and the interesting points like them for example the difficulties. The language at first of course Yes, sometimes, but sometimes I don't know what I am saying about it. I just to talk about some words. But maybe it's not my real meaning. So I have to use many many words or sentences to express myself. That is the most difficult for me. And and on the other hand, it is not. It can't be come over because. Your language is make advantage of day by day. Everyday I learned from my collegues and my foreign colleagues and classmates So I think that if you want to make adavantage with communication you need to excises as often as possible. And I think that the language it is, although the language is a difficulty for everybody.

Mai [00:11:11] But if you do yourselves, if you do your best to exercise and open your mouth and express yourself to others, they can understand you. And you can understand. Others. Yeah. Okay, so you're able to bring all of these experiences in to your interviews and talk about them. Yeah. Oh, well, take the detail example for them.

Mai [00:11:35] Okay. And how how I am communicate with my classmates. And I was I told them some stories, some interesting stories for them to depict my expereince in UK

Eileen [00:11:49] Do you think in comparison to, let's say, somebody else who is, you know, going for the same job. Do you think these are some of the aspects that make a difference between, let's say, who would be offered the position? Somebody who has the experience that you have? Or let's say somebody who hasn't studied abraod and who doesn't have. intercultural communication experience.

Mai [00:12:21] Yeah, I think it might be my class in my , Major. Most of the foreign postgradautethese most of flora close to graduates,their age is from twenty three to twenty five or six. They are young people and most of them haven't worked for any firms

Mai [00:12:43] And they. They can't compare with which one is better. Which one is worse. They just don't want to find a job. If you ask of them when they attended the interview and for example, if my classmate and I attended the same interview, some questions. Especially relating to the working experience.they can't answer it or the interviewer can't get a satisfied answer

Mai [00:13:28] So I think this is my advantage Maybe. But to compare with the same age classmates maybe. I think their language is better than me.

Yiwen – Interview One

Yiwen: [00:23:26] it is a long stategy for me

Eileen: [00:23:31] Yeah.

Yiwen: [00:23:32] When I was in senior school year we had decided this after I graduated from my university undergraduate.

Yiwen: [00:23:45] I will go because in China that's very difficult and the competition is very strong to go to a postgraduate study. I don't think I can pass that exam to go to the postgrauage in China. but if we apply for a univeristy in the UK then it will be easier for me because that is not depends on just one exam. Just the final exam. It depends on the grades for you four year in undergraduate and your English skill that will be much easier for me. (Yeah okay) .

Eileen: [00:24:36] And when you said we decided do you mean you and your parents and so you talk you started talking about this quite some time ago years ago.

Eileen: [00:24:47] Who who thought of it first in terms of , who mentioned it?

Yiwen: [00:24:58] because my elder sister, not my real sister my cousin (Yes) she's studied in the univeristy of Sydney 10 years ago. Yeah yeah because she is older than me. So at that time there are not so many people go outside to study in another country but she did. Yeah yeah at that time my mom thought about it. Oh this is a good way as well.

Eileen: [00:25:40] was she. She came back come back to China got a job and so maybe seeing that . (Yeah) that was kind of it kind of helped quickly fast track through a few things.

Eileen: [00:25:51] Maybe and just one thing about high school.

Eileen: [00:25:59] What you see you did civil engineering for your first year at undergraduate so I'm going to presume that when you were in high school you

did the kind of the physics maths science route. (Yeah) not humanities (Yeah). And what made you choose civil engineering when you chose it for your undergraduates?

Eileen: [00:26:22] Or did you choose or did?

Yiwen: [00:26:32] Because I'm interested in physics.

Yiwen: [00:26:37] And the Civil engineer is about physics. So well they applied for an undergraduate at the University I don't have some... unlike the UK you can't choose all of the major in this university. It just if you are in Henan province you can choose this major in other provinces you can choose this major it is not for every major you can choose (okay) and have that limitation for our province. (Okay. Yeah). Because maybe the education resources is not enough for every major. So in some just because I'm interested in physics for me for my mother she think she thought because a civil engineer is the good major it also have a rank in the university it is a good Major to in my undergraduate university So if you would like to change your major from one to another. If you change from a good major to a normal one that will be easy but if you would like to change from a nromal one to a good one. That is a little bit hard but at that time my mum had made her decision to let me and change my major so she let me to choose the civil engineering because that is also a good major and the financial management is also a good major so that it would be easier.

Yiwen: [00:28:35] To change across and can I ask as well.

Eileen: [00:28:38] And this just general interest is also so different provinces that have certain limitations around what majors you can choose. Is that also to do with not even the educational resources of the province. But the economic resources. So where they see jobs that this province needs people who do this job do function?

Yiwen: [00:29:08] Different university have different limitation.

Appendix 6: Sample of third person participant stories

Yiwen's story

Yiwen is 23 years old and from Nanyang in Henan province. Studied her undergraduate degree in China, and came to the UK to study for masters last year. However, she was not happy with what she was studying and so decided to change her master's course before she completed her dissertation and chose a different masters at XX University. She is studying international marketing.

The masters she was studying in 2017/18 was Finance, but she did not like it and was not happy. She studied a pre-sessional course before she began that masters. She was very confused when she choosing that masters, she wanted to study marketing and management, but she chose finance because her mother told her she should study something similar to her undergraduate degree. Her parents and other members of her family do jobs related to finance, and in China, a career in finance is considered good because it has a good salary, and so she chose that.

Yiwen went to university in Dalian in the northeast of China; it is a seaside city so quite similar to Brighton. When she first went to university for her undergraduate she studied civil engineering, she was the in the top five of her major, and so she had the opportunity to change her major to something else. Her mum thought that civil engineering was not a good choice for a girl and thought she should change her major to finance. Her mum thought that being a civil engineer would mean she would need to work in a factory and that the job prospects for female civil engineers are limited. At that Yiwen describes that she did not really know what she liked and so she followed her mother's advice and changed her major, and she did very well in finance, during that time they studied some modules related to marketing and Yiwen began to find what she really liked. Yiwen describes that her mother had a strong influence on her decisions.

When she told her parents she wanted to change her masters major, they were not happy, and she thinks it is the first time she fought with her parents. At the time she was in York, she called them and told them what she was thinking. She was thinking a lot about her future and what she would like to do for her career, her job opportunities. She feels she had lost some of her confidence during that year studying finance, she did not do very well in some of her modules and failed two modules which she had to resit. She felt that if she stayed studying finance, she would not do well. When she told her parents they disagreed with her. She told them she is not happy and not happy about

what she has learnt during the year, and that she feels very confused about her future. The most important she says is that she can make this decision for herself, she knows what she wants, that it will be a challenge to start again, but she would like to do the things she likes not what she should do. Even though her parents disagreed with her they told her that if she can apply for the universities and course, she wants without the use of an agent and she gets accepted then she can do it; if she fails she has to continue with her dissertation and then come back to China to find a job.

Yiwen did it; she applied to different universities; she was a little bit limited because some of the universities had closed their applications. She chose many universities based on their world rank and their rank in the UK and the subjects and modules of the courses. She decided this time to focus more on the subject than on the rank and thinks she did a good job and did a better job than when she used an agent before. She concentrated on what she would learn and chose universities which were focused more on practice and than on theory because she felt learning practical applications of marketing would be better for getting a job in the future. She received an offer from five universities included York where she was and decided on XX university because she wanted to leave York, and then preferred the module choice at XX University. She is very happy with her choice.

When Yiwen was two years old, she went to boarding nursery school, and would only see her parents once a week, this was in Nanyang. Her parents were not in Nanyang and had to stay where they were for their work; it was not too far away only about one hour by train. Nanyang has better education opportunities so her parents thought it would be better for her to be in Nanyang. After two years her parents came to Nanyang, she moved back to her parent when she was six years old and began primary school and lived with her parents until she was 18 years old and went to Dalian to university. Her memories of living in the boarding school are very happy memories, there were a lot of other children, this boarding school was part of the military, and the children whose parents were in the army were there. She really enjoyed that time because the education was different than in regular nursery where they concentrate on learning math and Chinese and English, but at this boarding school they mostly did art and music, she remembers that she was very happy then. She feels that she has a good relationship with her parents and that she was happy being the boarding school. She thinks this relationship had stayed good up until last year when they fought about her wanting to change her masters degree. She thinks it is better again now; she feels it is that they have different views about her future and that this is something they need to discuss and work through. She feels it is getting better and last month she was talking with her father, and he said that he thinks she is very different from last year. Last year she was crying a lot and was very unhappy, and now she is so happy and positive every time they talk. Yiwen feels she made the

best choice for herself. Her mother still is not happy or at least is not telling Yiwen if she is happy about her choice.

Yiwen describes coming to study in the UK as being a long strategy for her, Yiwen and her parents decided when she was in senior high school that when she graduates from her undergraduate degree, she should go abroad to study. Yiwen says this is because in China it is very difficult to go to postgraduate study and the competition is very strong. She does not think she can pass the exam to go to postgraduate study in China and thinks it will be easier to apply for a university in the UK because it is not based on one exam or the final exam of your undergraduate. It is based on your grade across the four years of undergrad and your English skill. This will be easier for her.

The idea of studying abroad first came about though because Yiwen's cousin studied in Australia maybe ten years ago and at that time not many students left China to go abroad and so she had a lot of opportunities when she returned to China, and so her mom thought it might a good way for Yiwen.

When Yiwen was in high school she studied the science stream; she chose to study civil engineering because she is interested in physics, at that time her mother allowed her to choose civil engineering because it would open up some opportunities for Yiwen. In some universities in China, if you study a good major and want to change to another good major, you can, and so in her university, she was able to change from civil engineering to financial management. Yiwen describes her undergraduate university as belonging to the second tier of universities in China. Yiwen says that no matter what the rank of the university is in the UK it will be better than that of the Chinese universities.

Yiwen's plan is to return to China at some point but would like to enter an internship in the UK first because there are too many students who have graduated with a masters degree from the UK, and she thinks that she won't have enough competition power for when she goes back to China, and so she needs something else, and added experience so if can get an internship that would be the best.

Yiwen would like to work for a marketing consultation company as her first choice, and second, would be to do some brand management and analysis. At present, her focus is to graduate with her masters degree and then to get a job. Ideally, when she returns to China, she would like to move to Beijing, because there will be more job opportunities and she feels that in Beijing things are fairer and more equal amongst people. It is easier for people from

other provinces to have good job opportunities whereas in smaller cities it is more complex and based more on personal relationships. Yiwen's mother works in a bank, and her father is a businessman in a construction company. Yiwen describes Beijing as being a fair place and more equal because she feels in comparison to Shanghai people can be more themselves and where they are from does not matter as much. Yiwen says in Shanghai and she says this is just her opinion, but people from Shanghai think that people form other provinces are not that good and that maybe it is because of pronunciation, but that also in Shanghai you have to care about so many things about how you present yourself, and so you can't be yourself. She thinks that this is much better in the UK people can be whoever they are, she gives the example that in China she would be considered fat and that this would be something she needs to think about, whereas in the UK people on the street do not care about this. In her words, you do not need to pay attention to other's attitudes; you can just think about yourself and your attitude about yourself.

Yiwen undertook the pre-session course in York before studying her master there, she did an eight-week pre-sessional course and found it very useful. Yiwen still uses a lot of what she learnt then now studying at XX University. She states it was not just about IELTS or the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking but also about how to better participate in class, how to communicate in seminars and lectures with other classmates. How to take notes, search for resources in the library and also to reference.

Yiwen enjoys XX university though does feel it is a bit too small and there are so many students, there are enough places to study, even when she and her classmates try to book a study space they are always on the waiting list. Yiwen lives off campus in a flat she rents with another Chinese student, she found this place as a friend she knows lived there last year. Yiwen does feel that her experience of living in York has made a difference in her experience now, that it gave her the confidence to live off campus.

Yiwen describes herself as kind, positive, hardworking, and confident. Though she suffered a set back in her confidence last year, she feels that she is naturally confident and this has returned this year as she is studying something she loves and is enjoying life.

She does experience challenges on her course; she does not have a background in marketing whether in study or work, and so finds some of the theory and principles of marketing difficult to understand, many of her classmates have a background in marketing and so compared to them she thinks she finds it a bit harder. But she has a passion for it and even on her way to campus and around Brighton when she sees marketing campaigns that

come in her lectures, and she feels that she can understand it well, that she has a talent for marketing. She still feels that her grades are not that good because there are other students who do better than her, but she feels that every time she can do better and that in the next assignment and next module she can do better, she feels she has the confidence to do better.

She thinks that in the past, her parents, teachers, and friends do not consider that she is very good at studying, they think she is very good at communicating and is very caring towards others, but she is not good at studying. And she thinks the same, but she knows that when she starts working that she will do well at her job because she is good at a lot of other things. Her father has told her, you can doing everything well except studying. But this year she feels that this is different that can do well on her course and that she can do well at studying. She told her father this, and he was surprised but believes her.

Yiwen still feels that her English language skills are not enough for her course this year, last year the lectures she had were about finance and so mostly about math, but this year it is different. She received an unconditional offer for her marketing course but thought that when she first started, she could not understand the lecture very well and could not participate. She found this quite difficult, though many of the concepts she knew in Chinese she could not understand it in English. So she told herself and encouraged herself that she had to participate in class and she had to raise her hand and talk to the lecturer twice in the first week, five times in the second. She did this and felt so much better, she was not scared of class, and she talks a lot with her classmates, and has made some good friends with classmates from other countries which she has found very helpful. Most of Yiwen's friends are Chinese, but she has some friends from the UK, Greece and Malaysia, they always speak English together and help each other with studying. In the first semester, they had a group project to do; she found it was a great way to discuss thing with each other and to become friends.

Appendix 7: Sample of reflective statement

Mai's Reflections

Part I Experience of Studying in the UK

I was a postgraduate student of the University of XXX from 2018 to 2019. I remember that it was in May last year when I arrived in UK. I came into the campus after two days. I heard that XXX university is a unique one which is located in the national park and I felt falling love with its gorgeous natural environment and friendly academic atmosphere at first sight. The international students were guided to several classrooms to attend the placement test of pre-session course. I was a little nervous because it was my first examination in the UK. The examiner was a blond hair lady who was a tutor of the language centre. We had a pleasant conversation. I cannot recall the detail content of the dialogue, but I remember that she praised my spoken English and joked my IELTS speaking score that I joined in China before might be underestimated. Her tender voice and humorous attitude enabled me relaxed and comfortable. For now, I still appreciate that each of tutors and professors I afterwards met in the UK was so kind and patient tutors like who I met first in the XXX uni. Excellent people owning good character gave me confidence to persist studying in a foreign country.

During my studying of pre-sessional and postgraduate courses, I was constantly exercising the thinking mode of Hesperian. Critical thinking helps me to find out more academic approaches that could direct to different conclusion. However, it is not easy to change from Chinese curve thinking model to linear one. I had to spend much time to digest abundant academic articles to support my essays and assessments. It was a hard but enjoyable process. After I completed each subject module essay, I experienced excitement and happiness. Through massive reading and writing and tutors' direction, I learnt how to organise an academic article and express my points referencing professional bibliography.

I had learnt lots during my studying life in the UK, including studying and living independently abroad and acquiring top academic knowledge. I will never forget this experience.

Part II Returning home

The most impressive thing should be air. Although the Chinese government has been committed to deal with and control pollution for several years, very little actually happened. I have to admit that its air quality is worse than in the UK. It deserves part of the blame for building plenty of factories in cities in the 50s to 90s pursuing financial interests. The lesson from nature tells us that there is no shortcut to achieving success but persistently doing the effort. If you pass through a shortcut to get it, it is not without cost, and it is also for studying.

My following plans are to enjoy my rare holiday and search for a formal job which is relevant to my subject. I will spend my holiday to attend the selection test organised by the Shanghai Information Technology Security Office which provides many posts being relevant to my subject. It might be a chance to have a general impress of the situation of demand for the talent in the realm of IT law. Additionally, I am attempting to interview some Internet or innovation industry companies to learn what legal service they need. The information could assist me to find out those jobs that I am interested and good at. Lastly, I will be back to the UK in January next year to be present my graduation ceremony.

The UK studying experience taught me additional approaches to thinking and analysing. Comparing with previous job experience, the salary is no longer the only criteria that I will consider. The direction of career and perspective of development are also factors. I am doing massive preliminary work to research the target firms, such as the post they recruit, the main business, the company's level of development in the industry, even their economic situation and the like. Based on such primary research, I will conclude which of them are my terminal subjects and prepare my interview. I will pay more attention to opting which companies, not limited in the law firms, I am suitable for. However, I would have not considered so much before.