



**Exploring the attitudes and perceptions of Chinese
students towards their tertiary studies in New
Zealand**

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extend has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of any university or other institution of higher learning.

Bingyao Peng

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Abstract

Because of economic growth and increased competition in the workplace, studying abroad has become popular in China. Chinese students are extremely important in the international education market. New Zealand, as one of the destination countries, recruits thousands of Chinese students annually. The tuition fees paid by these students are of great importance especially in the education sector. In order to attract more Chinese students coming to New Zealand, tertiary institutes may be interested in understanding their demands, concerns, and difficulties. This study examines the attitudes and perceptions of Chinese post-80s undergraduate students towards New Zealand higher education. Three main issues are explored: (1) The reasons why Chinese students leave China and choose New Zealand; (2) The challenges they encounter while studying in New Zealand; (3) The advantages and disadvantages of Chinese and New Zealand education. An interpretivist paradigm was adopted in my research, which enabled me to uncover the motivations, intentions, and values of the younger Chinese generation in depth by talking with them.

The findings indicate that the difficulties of gaining admission to a prestigious Chinese university and of finding good jobs in China are the primary reasons why Chinese students prefer to study abroad. The attractive factors of New Zealand include its good natural and social environment, Western-style education, and opportunities of working in the country and immigrating after graduation. Insufficient language proficiency, cultural differences, and different educational systems are the major challenges that result in Chinese students' isolation from local students and poor performance in their academic achievements. However, despite the challenges they have encountered, most Chinese students appreciate New Zealand tertiary education system because they have become confident and independent. Most importantly, they have developed their capacity for critical thought.

1 Introduction

Because of globalization and the internationalization process, overseas students have gradually come to make up a significant proportion of students in tertiary education in English-speaking destination countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (Azmat, Osborne, Rossignol, Jogulu, Rentschler, Robottom & Malathy, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2013). China is the biggest source of international students all over the world because of its demographic changes and continuing population growth (New Zealand Education, 2013a). The considerable growth of the middle class in China has enabled more families to support overseas study, and the vast population means that “even a small percentage increase in tertiary enrolments equates to large numbers of new students” in destination countries (New Zealand Education, 2013a).

Recruiting international students can benefit the host countries in two main ways, and economic interest is predominant (Andrade, 2006; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Bodycott, 2012). As Altbach and Knight (2007) indicate, higher education often forms a substantial part of a country’s total economy. In 2011, New Zealand universities earned \$292 million in tuition revenues from international fee-paying students, of which Chinese students contributed \$128 million (Ministry of Education, 2012). In addition, the highly skilled and academically talented international students who remain in the host society after graduation can meet the countries’ workforce demands (Andrade, 2006; Bodycott, 2012). Money is not the only motivation for recruiting overseas students. Some schools, especially the traditional non-profit universities, expect to achieve diversification in campus and to enhance cultural understanding by attracting international students (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Bodycott, 2012).

No matter what the motivation is, it is important for universities to have a share of this lucrative higher education international market. However, the market is fiercely competitive. New Zealand education institutions had a rapid increase in international

enrolments from 1998 to 2003, and peaked at 29,000 students in 2004, but this number decreased steadily from 2004 to 2008 and has levelled out at around 19,000 since 2009. The increase and fall in recruitment numbers for international students is driven primarily by Chinese students (Ministry of Education, 2012; 2013). Moreover, with the development of globalization, there is competition not only among the five traditional destination countries mentioned previously, but also from Asian and non-English speaking European countries, including Japan, South Korea, France, Germany, and Russia (New Zealand Education, 2013a; 2013b).

If New Zealand is to be seen as being a desirable destination for Chinese students, their expectations, difficulties, and demands should be given attention by New Zealand education institutions. Nevertheless, there is not a great deal of research that is aimed specifically at Chinese students who study in New Zealand (Holmes, 2004; Kavan & Wilkinson, 2003; Skyrme, 2007). Most articles explore Chinese students' experiences in America, Britain, and Australia (Azmat et al, 2013; Briguglio & Smith, 2012; Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Gill, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007; Roy, 2013; Wang, Harding & Mai, 2012). The assumption seems to be that the findings from these students will be relevant for New Zealand. Although it shares a similar educational philosophy with America, Britain, and Australia, students' expectations and problems may still differ on account of the different culture and society in New Zealand. This study explores the attitudes and perceptions of the younger generations from mainland China towards New Zealand's tertiary education. It may provide useful information to Chinese students who intend to study in New Zealand and also to the national higher education institutions so that they can explore the possibilities for improvement, to help and attract more Chinese students.

This thesis has five chapters in total. Chapter 2 is a literature review which explores relevant material. Chapter 3 explains the methodology that has been used in this study and its potential limitations. Chapter 4 describes the findings. The results of the interviews will be described. The final chapter analyses and discusses the results.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature about Chinese students in higher education in English speaking countries, mainly America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. The literature review discusses the cohort of post 80s students, their reasons for leaving China for further studies, their adjustment to the host country, and some of the major challenges that they face.

2.2 The post 80s in China

2.2.1 The origin of post 80s

Generations are defined by year of birth, while cohorts refer to people who share events experienced as they reach economic adulthood together (Schewe et al, 2013). Therefore, cohort is a finer division of population than generation. It melds age descriptors with behavioural motivations and values. Different countries have different cohorts, because these cohorts are determined by national and international events that have an influence on the society (Schewe & Meredith, 2004). For example, the Western world has baby boomers, Generation Xers, and the millennial cohorts. In China, the concept of “post 80s”, which collectively refers to young writers who were born in the 1980s, was first coined by writer Xiaobing Gong (Wei, 2009). The term became popular as a result of *Time Magazine*. In 2004, the teenage female writer Chunshu was put on the cover of Time Asia. She was regarded as the representative of China’s post 80s, with another younger writer Hanhan. This clear naming from powerful international media prompted the wide use of the term “post 80s” in China (Peng, 2008). Moreover, adding the word "post" as a prefix before generations to identify cohorts rapidly became common practice (Zhao, 2011), such as post 70s, 85s, and 90s.

2.2.2 The background of post 80s

Post 80s has two literal meanings. In a narrow sense, it refers to people born from

1980 to 1989, while more broadly speaking it includes all the people who were born after 1980 (Yufan, 2009). Nevertheless, its actual influence on society, economies, and culture is far more than merely a name. As Blake (1988) indicated, every generation has to adapt to the environment in which they live, and create their own subculture. Post 80s show obvious specific characteristics of the era that are very different from people who were born in the 1940s, 50s, 60s, and 70s. They grew up in a sharply changing period of Chinese society (Liu, 2011). With the reform and opening up of the country in 1978, China ushered in a modernization process which has led to economic growth, and scientific and technological development. Post 80s' lifestyle, ideology, and values have changed a great deal compared with the older generations (Wei, 2009). They are active in the increasingly networked and horizontally interactive information environment (Lewis, 2010), influenced by commercial entertainment, and they actively advocate materialism and consumerism (Wei, 2009). The implementation of the one child policy made this cohort more self-centred, without competition from siblings, and overprotected by the full love of their parents and grandparents.

Culturally, post 80s are influenced by the old and new, Eastern and Western multi-culture (Peng, 2008). On one hand, Confucianism is the basis of Chinese culture. The post 80s are inevitably influenced by this when growing up in China. On the other hand, they also accept various anti-traditional and Western ideas spread by the media and the Internet. Although modernized development and the shift in values in Chinese society have resulted in a higher quality of life for post 80s, these changes have also put pressure on them (Liu, 2011). While Facebook and Twitter are widely used in Western countries, China has its own social networking sites, Weibo and Xiaonei. A description of the post 80s was posted on these websites, which has since been reposted by thousands of people who were born in that generation (Chen, 2006). It says, in effect, that when the post 80s were at school, jobs were arranged by the country, and people who graduated from primary school were able to become leaders; now they need to find their own jobs, and undergraduate students quite often can only

get menial work. When the post 80s were at school, houses were distributed by the country; now they need to buy their own houses. When the post 80s were at school, having a bicycle was enough to get married; now when they are of marriageable age, if they do not have a house or a car they cannot marry (Chen, 2006). It can be seen that “change” is the key word for the post 80s, compared with the lives of their parents and grandparents. The younger generation is faced with challenges and anxieties in contemporary China.

2.3 Students’ reasons for studying abroad

Today, an increasing number of post 80s choose to finish their higher education abroad. Many of them even go straight from high school, without taking the college entrance examination in China. A report from EIC Education (2011) shows that there was a decrease in the domestic university entrance exam participation in China from 10,100,000 in 2007 to 9,330,000 in 2011, while the number of students who went abroad for higher education increased from 144,000 to 339,700 during the five years. Why do they decide to study so far away from home? It is partly because of the current situation in higher education in China, although personal factors also play an important role.

2.3.1 The current situation in higher education in China

Firstly, a concomitant increase in income since the reform and opening up policy ensures that more families have the capacity to afford international fees (Choi & Nieminen, 2012; Starr, 2012). Since 2001, more than 90 percent of overseas students have been self-funded, compared with the year 1995 when half the students depended on government funded scholarships (EIC Education, 2011). Meanwhile, the one child policy has also lightened the financial burden on parents. In addition, the traditional Confucian heritage of children first in family drives Chinese parents to do the very best they can for their children, and even to sacrifice their own needs if necessary to provide a high quality of life and education for their children (Bodycott, 2009; Liu, 2011).

Secondly, although the admission rates for students who take the domestic university entrance exams have continued to rise, there is still an over-demand for available places (EIC Education, 2011). In 2012, among 9,150,000 examinees, 6,850,000 were admitted to universities (China Education Online, 2012a). And more importantly, there are insufficient top-ranked universities in China (Azmat et al, 2013; New Zealand Education, 2013c). In 2012, only 795,000 students were admitted into the elite universities (China Education Online, 2012b). Dramatic social class gaps, based on occupation, power, and wealth, exist in China (Sun, 2006). People who have a good educational background have more opportunities to ascend into the upper class, while those who graduate from second or third ranked domestic institutions will find it difficult to find a good job with a high salary or to be promoted in the employment market. Furthermore, the overall performance of Chinese universities does not compare well as far as teaching, research, knowledge transfer, and international outlook is concerned, compared with other world class universities (Times Higher Education, n.d.). The exam-oriented education system still dominates the education scene, although all-around development has been advanced by the government since the late 1980s (Liu, 2011). According to the World University Rankings 2013-2014 (Times Higher Education, n.d.), two universities in mainland China are in the top 100, namely Peking University at 45 and Tsinghua University at 50, and eight are ranked between 201 and 400. There are in total 95 prestigious universities in China (Zou, 2011). Universities in the United States and the United Kingdom occupy the most positions in the top 100 (Times Higher Education, n.d.). Of Australia's 40 universities, five are included in the top 100 and nineteen are in the top 400 (Harrison, 2011; Times Higher Education, n.d.). There are eight universities in New Zealand and five of them are ranked in the top 400 (Times Higher Education, n.d.). Therefore, even the elite universities in China cannot meet students' demands for high quality education (New Zealand Education, 2013d). Some students in China become disappointed about the inflexible, out-of-date, and limited education approaches and begin to value the Western educational philosophy (Huang, 2008; Rawlings & Sue, 2013).

Thirdly, the employment situation for college graduates in China has changed from traditional job arrangements by the government to today's intensified competition, in which graduates from prestigious universities are more likely to find suitable jobs, while an overseas degree is regarded by many people to be of higher status in society than one from a non-prestigious local university (Chen, 2011; Cheng, 2009). Furthermore, China's open door policy to the outside world makes English more crucial than ever. Therefore, improving English proficiency by studying abroad is of great help in finding a good job.

2.3.2 Personal factors that influence students' decisions to study abroad

Apart from the influence of the current situation in China, there appear to be four other personal factors that drive Chinese students to study abroad. They are firstly, students' greater awareness or impression of the destination country which may include its freedom, prosperity, openness, and the reputation of the educational institutions (Bankston, 2004; Bodycott, 2009; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007; Zhao & Guo, 2002). Secondly, they are drawn by an environment with a different lifestyle, climate, and approach (Bass, 2005; Bodycott, 2009; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Collins, 2008; Fam & Gray, 2000; Mei, 2007; Zhao & Guo, 2002); Thirdly, recommendations from relatives or alumni networks who have international experiences, or are living abroad play a role (Gareth, 2005; Hiu, 2001; Mei, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007; Zhao & Guo, 2002); Finally, there is often a desire to immigrate or work in the destination country after graduation (Bodycott, 2009; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Collins, 2008; Hiu, 2001; Mei, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007; Zhao & Guo, 2002).

Moreover, the role of parents cannot be ignored in the decision-making process. Most post 80s grew up in the Confucian culture of filial piety, which requires children to love, respect, and obey their parents without question (Ho, 1996; Salili, Fu, Tong & Tabatabai, 2001). In Bodycott and Lai's (2012) research on the influence of family in the decision to undertake international higher education, 44.2 percent of interviewees

said they had the idea of studying abroad, while the remainder said their parents expected it. Additionally, 65 percent of student's parents made the final choice of destination country, university, and major for their children. Parents seem more concerned about high-paid employment opportunities and immigration prospects in the destination country (Bodycott and Lai, 2012; Yang, 2007), while students regard this experience as a step to knowing the Western world and experiencing high-quality education (Azmat et al, 2013; Zhao & Guo, 2002).

2.3.3 New Zealand's position as one of the host countries for Chinese students

New Zealand Education's 2013 report (New Zealand Education, 2013e) on market opportunities in China analyzes the factors which make New Zealand attractive to Chinese students. Compared with the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, New Zealand is competitive in three aspects. Firstly, its educational system is based on the UK model and its degrees are internationally recognized, but the tuition fees and living expenses are significantly lower than in the other four English speaking countries. Secondly, the society is stable and friendly. People studying in New Zealand do not need to worry about their safety. Thirdly, international students are usually allowed to work part time and New Zealand is the only country to offer students a one-year open work visa after graduation. Moreover, the immigration policies in New Zealand at the present time are quite favourable. However, the biggest problem is that many Chinese people have a limited awareness of New Zealand because it is far away from China and is not as well-known as the superpower countries. As a result, New Zealand generally serves as a back-up destination for Chinese students (New Zealand Education, 2013e).

Despite the open door policy and wide use of social media, it is not easy for Mainland Chinese students to adjust to Western countries. The problems associated with this adjustment are discussed in the next section.

2.4 Chinese students' adjustment to host countries

Generally Chinese students find that the familiar cues from home are suddenly replaced with strange, ambiguous, and unpredictable Western ones in the new setting once they arrive at the destination country for study (Zapf, 1991). Their previous assumptions, based on their taken-for-granted understanding of Chinese culture about how to behave and get on with other people in society, are no longer valid, so adjustment is not always easy, no matter how much preparation the overseas students have undertaken. Problems will arise if they keep acting consistently with, and interpreting their own and their host's actions in terms of their own culture (Noesjirwan & Freestone, 1979). Adjustment for people who study abroad is a complex and active process of managing stress which is mediated by the variables of personality, social network, and degree of life change (Gu, Schweisfurth & Day, 2010; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping & Todman, 2008).

2.4.1 Developing multicultural personalities

It is predictable that students who develop multicultural personalities will find it much easier to adapt to the new environment (Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002; Ponterotto, 2010). A multicultural personality is sufficiently open-minded to actively accept another culture, is emotional stable, flexible, able to take the social initiative to make friends with local people, and assertive enough to express personal opinions in public (Lee & Ciftci, 2013; Ponterotto, 2010). However, these characteristics may not be highly regarded by the collectivist society in China, which emphasizes people's conformity and obedience (Ho, Si-qing, Cheng & Chan, 2001).

2.4.2 Social network

Zhou et al. (2008) find that international students who establish a good social network have better adjustment than those who do not. Their negative feelings such as loneliness and homesickness are mitigated by increased satisfaction with their social interaction (Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002). Connections with same country, international, and especially domestic students provide international students with a

sense of belonging, that they have been integrated into the campus community and been accepted by the ethnic community in the host country (Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune, 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006). Moreover, these relationships can provide useful information about life and cultural background in the society, with students improving their understanding and adjustment (Lee & Ciftci, 2013; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006).

2.4.3 Life changes while studying abroad

The three most influential life changes experienced by students who study abroad are:

- Separation from family,
- Using another language for communication,
- Experiencing a different educational system (Chen, 1999; Trice, 2007).

2.4.3.1 Family separation

The first aspect is family separation. Students who yearn for familiar surroundings are homesick. Homesickness may lead to loneliness, depression, and alienation (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). Earlier research indicated that Chinese students suffered a high degree of homesickness and thus had both poorer mental and physical health in host countries (Chataway & Berry, 1989; Li & Kaye, 1998). However, Briguglio and Smith's (2012) recent study highlights that feelings of homesickness are of a relatively short duration and disappear quite soon after arrival. Food and accommodation are also problematic for homestay students (Li & Kaye, 1998; Pritchard & Skinner, 2002). These issues, which were not anticipated prior to their arrival, were of concern for 70% of participants in Marriott, Plessis and Pu's (2010) research on international students' experiences in New Zealand.

2.4.3.2 Language shift

Using English as their main language during the overseas learning process is a huge change and challenge for Chinese students. Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family and is non-alphabetic and tonal, while English is in the

“Indo-European linguistic family of languages, has a Roman alphabet and uses stress on syllables to express meaning” (Sharif & Osterling, 2011, p. 67). These two languages differ widely in structure, grammar, and phonetics, cannot be translated into the other directly and are difficult to speak well as a second language (Huang & Rinaldo, 2009). In addition, the study of English in China is not well balanced. Teachers focus mainly on the practice of reading and writing, and only minimally on speaking and listening (Briguglio & Smith, 2012). Moreover, students’ English competence never has a chance to be examined in a real foreign environment. Therefore, although students are prepared linguistically before going abroad, most of them still find it difficult and feel depressed while studying in the home country (Andrade, 2006). Chinese students’ insufficient language proficiency may result in a lack of understanding and difficulties expressing meaning, which hugely affects their academic and social adjustment (Tait, 2010; Roy, 2013).

2.4.3.3 Different educational systems in Eastern and Western countries

The last important change is that there are great differences in educational systems between Confucianism oriented Eastern countries, and Western oriented countries. These differences are mainly reflected in the teaching and learning approaches.

Learning approaches

There are two kinds of learning styles put forward by Biggs (2003). They are surface learning and deep learning. Surface learning refers to memorization and repetition strategies. Most studies consider this to be a method that only targets the passing of examinations rather than analysis, organization, and understanding (Holmes, 2004; Kim, 2003; Tait, 2010). Chinese students are generally characterized as utilizing surface learning as a main approach to studying (Hammond & Gao, 2002). They spend more time listening and taking notes in class than thinking and speaking. Therefore, their performance seems to be very quiet and they do not express their own perspectives. Outside of class, almost no assignments are given to students in Chinese universities, so they do little independent research (Briguglio & Smith, 2012). Besides,

in the exam-dominated tertiary education system, passing the final exam means everything. This is not difficult for students because most questions only require closed-ended responses. What students need to do is memorize. Chinese students never miss the last lecture in a semester, because their teachers will highlight the detailed key points which may appear in the exam (Hassan & Jamaludin, 2010).

However, there are also some researchers (Tang, 1993; Watkins, Regmi & Astilla, 1991) who argue that although it is a symbol of surface learning, spending a large amount of time on memorization and repetition does not mean Chinese students are studying on the surface. They first memorize in order to finally understand. Furthermore, this method seems to be a more effective way for the students to conduct deeper learning, especially when they study in a second language environment, because it enables their brains to think and respond as quickly as possible by reducing the memory load (Kember & Gow, 1989). This could also explain why Chinese students normally do better in mathematics and science than Western students through memorizing large numbers of formulas when they are at primary, junior high, and senior high school (Sue & Okazaki, 1990).

In contrast, learning in Western countries is generally a question and answer process in which knowledge is sought, evaluated, and co-constructed (Holmes, 2004). This is described as deep learning by Biggs (2003). This method values active involvement and experiences with wide reading, critical thinking, and innovation (De Vita, 2001; Jaju, Kwak & Zinkhan, 2002). This is reflected in students' performance in being proactive and sharing ideas, not being afraid of expressing a different opinion or making mistakes in class, and spending more time after class reading and sharing the ideas generated in class with other students (Choi & Nieminen, 2012).

Teaching approaches

In addition to differences in learning styles, teaching approaches also differ between Eastern and Western countries. Deeply influenced by Confucianism, Chinese people

have great respect for older people, as mentioned previously, with regard to the relationship between parents and children, and this also applies to teachers. Teachers are in a position of authority and dominate the class at all times. They speak a lot and expect the students to trust their words without question (Hassan & Jamaludin, 2010). Freire (1993) calls this the banking model of education, which refers to a situation where “learners are treated as passive, manageable and absolutely ignorant objects” (p. 208), just like empty boxes to be filled up. As a result, Chinese students “tend to believe what is commonly believed and what is socially rewarded” (Kim, 2003, p. 73). In addition, large class sizes at Chinese universities means that it is not possible for students to have many opportunities for questions and discussion (Briguglio & Smith, 2012). Teachers have to control the class to ensure that they finish on schedule.

In comparison, the Western teaching approach is student-dominated. Teachers are regarded as an assistive tool to support and encourage students in self-management and self-learning (Choi & Nieminen, 2012). Their relationship is relatively open, so students feel more comfortable talking to their teachers than do those in Eastern countries (Hassan & Jamaludin, 2010).

Different definitions of good teachers and good students

Zhou et al. (2008) conclude that there are differing perceptions of good teachers and students in the East and West. According to Chinese students, good teachers should tell them what and how to learn in great detail, and the teachers themselves must be knowledgeable and even moral role models to be followed. While from a teacher’s point of view, respect, trust, and obedience, rather than criticism, are basic characteristics of good students in China, from the perspectives of Western students, good teachers should not limit their development but should facilitate them to explore their abilities. Similarly, teachers in Western countries expect students to have opinions and engage in discussion positively.

2.5 Major challenges faced by Chinese students

Although many international students will experience problems in host countries, studies indicate that Asian students suffer greater levels of stress and face more difficulties than those who are of European origin because of their race, country, language, and culture (Li & Kaye, 1998; Wilton & Constantine, 2003).

2.5.1 Communication

One of the real difficulties that Chinese students encounter during their international tertiary education process is limited interaction with local students (Kimmel & Volet, 2012; Strauss, U & Young, 2011; Summers & Volet, 2008). This is also a contributing factor to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Rawlings & Sue, 2013). Thompson and Thompson (1996) even report the communication issue as being the most difficult adjustment area for international students. Only a few Chinese students are able to develop a close relationship with domestic students, while the majority makes friends with people from their own country (Bochner, McLeod & Lin, 1997; Hechanova-Alamoay, Beehr, Christiansen & Van Horn, 2002).

Initially, language proficiency may be the biggest obstacle to establishing a social network in host countries (Wang et al, 2012). Chinese students are not confident about speaking English with domestic students and are afraid of being looked down on and laughed at. As a result, they tend to segregate themselves from their local peers and stay together as a group, in which they communicate easily and have the support of their co-nationals (Andrade, 2006). The longer they stay in such a group, the more loyalty and obligation they have, which makes them feel guilty if they are close to native speakers outside the group (Summers & Volet, 2008). Moreover, there are few opportunities for both Chinese and domestic students to get to know each other well. They live in two parallel social worlds and the only intersection is class (Gareis, 2012).

In addition, cultural differences are a significant problem influencing interaction.

According to Colvin and Jaffar (2007), achieving successful intercultural communication is a complicated process of understanding, and being understood as Chinese students. They have to first recognize their hybrid identity, which is constructed within a Confucian heritage society and is refined in the host culture, and then ensure they translate their words and those of others in a clear, appropriate, and unambiguous way (Bodycott, 2012). Harrison and Peacock (2010) name this process as mindful interactions which “require the individual to be keenly aware of a range of information coming from their conversational partner, as well as considering the impact of their own words and actions” (p. 891).

In order to overcome these communication difficulties, Wilson (2011) suggests that Chinese students should increase their confidence and flexibility and also extend their ‘comfort zone’ in a foreign environment. The most important is they must have the aspiration to accept the challenge of making friends with people from the host country. Moreover, finding out about shared interests, such as sports, with their fellow students, is also an effective way to alleviate problems (Harrison & Peacock, 2010).

2.5.2 Listening

Listening to native-speaker delivery from both lecturers and classmates in lectures is a problematic issue for Chinese students. Previous research found that they had difficulties with comprehension when domestic students had strong accents, spoke at a fast speed, and used long and complex sentences, idioms, colloquialisms, and humour (Cox & Yamaguchi, 2010; Du-Babcock, 2002; Huang, 2004; Ramsay, Barker & Jones, 1999). In addition, the teaching style of some lecturers results in international students having difficulties in class. Firstly, lecturers sometimes enrich knowledge with examples that are not in the textbook, or refer to tangential topics (Mendelsohn, 2002; Roy, 2013). Students who have limited listening skills find it difficult to follow such classes. Secondly, some teachers dislike using discourse markers, such as “now”, “because” and “but”, to distinguish one key point from another, and do not sum up at the end of class (Huang & Brown, 2009). This is hard to

follow and makes international students feel confused about the whole content of the lecture. Thirdly, they find it difficult to follow in class when the lecturer does not make use of the whiteboard. Some Western lecturers prefer to use PowerPoint presentations and seldom write down key points. As a consequence, international students have to spend more time taking notes: first they listen to the teacher, then translate into their first language, and finally understand what is important (Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006).

2.5.3 Speaking

In addition to listening, speaking is an issue also encountered by many Chinese international students in class (Cox & Yamaguchi, 2010; Huang & Brown, 2009; Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006). Because of their exposure to Western culture via television and the Internet, today's post 80s are much more willing to express their ideas directly and explicitly in public, compared with older generations. However, it is obvious that this kind of Chinese-style openness with the indelible influence of traditional culture and educational methods still does not meet Western educators' standards, so problems emerge (Wang et al, 2012). When Chinese students think they are showing their politeness and being modest by rarely giving comments voluntarily in class discussion, this is regarded as being "indifferent, non-participative and lazy" in the Western educational environment (Wang et al, 2012, p. 627).

The differences between individualism and collectivism also contribute to Chinese students' reluctance to speak out. China is a typical collectivistic country in which people appreciate harmony among social groups (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Therefore, Chinese students tend to fully accept others' opinions and avoid disagreement and criticism while discussing, and their indirect style of talking does not always make sense to Western students (Wang et al, 2012). Moreover, they perceive the actions of interrupting and seeking clarification in class as inappropriate and impolite (Cortazzi & Jin, 1987). They do not want to waste the time of teachers and other fellow students by their own questions which might not be very important

(Chalmers & Volet, 1997). As a result, they prefer to talk to teachers after class (Hu & Fell-Eisenkraft, 2003).

Moreover, as a minority group studying in a host country, shyness, fear of losing face, and language difficulties are also reasons for why students keep silent in class (Hu & Fell-Eisenkraft, 2003; Robertson, Line, Jone & Thomas, 2000; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). In a study of Asian students in New Zealand, Beaver and Tuck (1998) emphasized the importance of teachers in the role of mediators. They found that teachers should not take Asian students' silence for granted, but should recognize their students' difficulties and try to involve them in class discussion. This can be facilitated by giving Asian students time to prepare, calling on them by name to answer, and setting up small groups for communication.

2.5.4 Getting help

As far as getting help is concerned when international students have problems, Lee and Rice (2007) found that they tended to avoid asking their teachers or domestic fellow students for help, due to a lack of confidence in their language proficiency, even though they were eager to succeed. Briguglio and Smith (2012) conducted two semi-structured interviews at different times to compare a group of Chinese students' attitudes towards studying at Australian universities. Participants who were interviewed in their second or third week on campus said they generally sought help from their Chinese peers as well as through electronic means, while four months later, when they were interviewed again, participants indicated that they still relied on the support of other Chinese students or roommates for personal matters, but asked teachers more about study issues.

2.5.5 Time management

Time management is another difficulty for Chinese students. They are accustomed to being controlled by teachers, as mentioned previously. Therefore, they are not familiar with the Western self-directed learning style and lack relevant study skills (Gill, 2007).

In Briguglio and Smith's (2012) research, a number of participants said they found it difficult to take full advantage of their plentiful free time to study after class. It seems that Chinese culture is polychronic, which means that Chinese people prefer to do several things at once, compared with monochronic cultures that focus on one thing at a time (Hall, 1989, Morden, 1999). This means that Chinese students seldom have clear schedules with a strict sequencing of the activities they need to do in order to complete their assignments before a deadline. Therefore, they often suffer time pressure when more than one assignment is given (Wang et al, 2012).

2.5.6 Assessments

2.5.6.1 Academic writing

Academic writing in English is difficult for many Chinese students. First of all, different cultural values and assumptions lead to differences "in the structuring of Chinese and English scholarly arguments" (Singh & Fu, 2008, p. 135). Chinese logic is circular and uses an inductive mode, compared with the Western direct and deductive rhetorical strategy (Song & Cadman, 2013). The writing style that Chinese students are accustomed to is one that values roundabout statements, and generally begins a subject from other people's theories, then expands to several possible angles, and finally ends with a few words giving the author's point of view (Shen, 1989). In this way, Chinese writers expect readers to infer what they really want to express, instead of telling them directly (Fox, 1994). As a consequence, teachers in host countries frequently find it difficult to understand what their Chinese students are writing about. Secondly, Chinese students have grown up in a Confucianism influenced high context culture. They respect authority and consider it important to give face to others, so it is not easy for them to analyze weaknesses and express disagreement or criticism in their writings, as Western students are required to do (Greenholz, 2003; Kennedy, 2002). As a result, Kavan and Wilkinson (2003) propose that teaching Chinese students to write in English by utilizing topic sentences, linear structure, and individual thoughts is essential.

Apart from these obvious writing issues caused by cultural differences, plagiarism is a potential risk that Chinese students often face during the process of academic writing. There is nothing wrong with Chinese students memorizing to achieve a deeper understanding, but the problem arises if they do not realize that the knowledge they have needs to be referenced when used in articles (Tait, 2010). Song and Cadman (2013) interviewed 69 Chinese undergraduate students studying in Australia about their understanding of plagiarism, and 67 respondents associated it with “cheating or academic dishonesty” (p. 268). Therefore, Song and Cadman (2013) assessed that “these students had a reasonably good understanding of what plagiarism entails” (p. 268). Nevertheless, in the following writing task of Song and Cadman’s (2013) study, of 64 completed assignments, there were 38% submissions containing improper references and even containing copied extracts. Thus it can be seen that Chinese students may have a similar understanding of the literal meaning of plagiarism to their domestic classmates, but there are different standards regarding what constitutes plagiarism between the Chinese and Western cultures. Chinese students do not appear to realize that what they are doing is, in Western eyes, dishonest. Holmes (2004) finds that Chinese students think it demonstrates their independent thinking skills if they are able to “internalize ideas and represent them in their own words instead of in those of the author” (p. 301), while in terms of Western universities’ policies, what the Chinese do is considered to be cheating (Holmes, 2004). A participant from Song and Cadman’s (2013) study said: “In China the plagiarism is different from here (Australia), I learned plagiarism here” (p. 269).

Besides this, in order to complete a writing assignment, good reading skills are essential. Chinese students are also surprised by the large amount of reading required in host countries. Generally, several chapters are given to students to read before a class, but Chinese students read much more slowly than the domestic students and sometimes need to read the material twice. They do not know how to skim to get a broad overview of a chapter, and identifying the key points is still difficult for them even though they read word by word (Kavan & Wilkinson, 2003). The solutions they

come up with to raise their reading efficiency are prioritizing the importance of reading assignments and only reading the introduction and conclusion sections of the less important texts (Holmes, 2004).

2.5.6.2 Group work

In general, Chinese students prefer individual study rather than group work while studying in Western countries (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). According to studies by Phuong-Mai, Terlouw and Pilot (2006) and Wang et al. (2012), there are five main reasons why Chinese students do not like group work. Firstly, due to the large class size and exam-oriented educational system in China, students have had few opportunities to experience group work. They are more familiar and comfortable with individual work. Secondly, Chinese students are used to clearly structured tasks with precise details designed by their teachers. Doing group work means they have to find teammates, delegate responsibilities, and make appointments to discuss the work independently of their teachers. What is more, Chinese students think that it is less risky to trust their teachers than to listen to their classmates. Thirdly, the Chinese culture emphasizes solidarity and harmony in the group, so there is a great possibility that Chinese students will hesitate to challenge their group members' ideas, or they will easily give up their ground, when there are arguments. Fourthly, group work needs a leader and Chinese students seldom volunteer for this, although they do not want to be led. Wang et al. (2012) explain this by saying that Chinese value modesty. Students are unwilling to give other fellow students an impression of showing off, so they avoid volunteering to be a leader. In addition, being a team leader is a tedious and demanding job. They do not want to undertake extra responsibilities or extra criticism. Fifthly, Chinese students care about grades, particularly individual academic excellence, because of the highly competitive, exam-oriented educational system of China (Wang et al, 2012). They feel stressed if someone in the group loafers on the job. As a result, the other students may do most of the work, but in the end every group member is given the same mark, which leads to the students having a passive attitude towards group work.

However, group work is inevitable while studying abroad. In their study of a semester-long group project on 233 international undergraduate students enrolled at an Australian business school, Summers and Volet (2008) found that Chinese students feel valued when they work in mixed groups consisting of people from different cultures, but Sarkodie-Mensah (1998) and Ouyang (2004) claim that Chinese students prefer to stay with their compatriots. In later research, Wang et al. (2012) found that there is a transition taking place in Chinese students' preference for culturally mixed teams, which can also be seen as a process from isolation, acculturation to cultural adaptation. Their research focused on a group of eight Chinese students studying business in the United Kingdom, and there were another group of eight who were continuing their studies in China serving as a contrast (Wang et al, 2012). Figure 1 summarizes the findings (p. 626). In the initial stage, participants feel comfortable staying in a Chinese circle because of their limited language skills, lack of confidence, and loyalty. With cultural exposure, they find the benefits of working with non-Chinese, such as having more opportunities to practise English, and learning from the broad knowledge and competencies of the other group members.

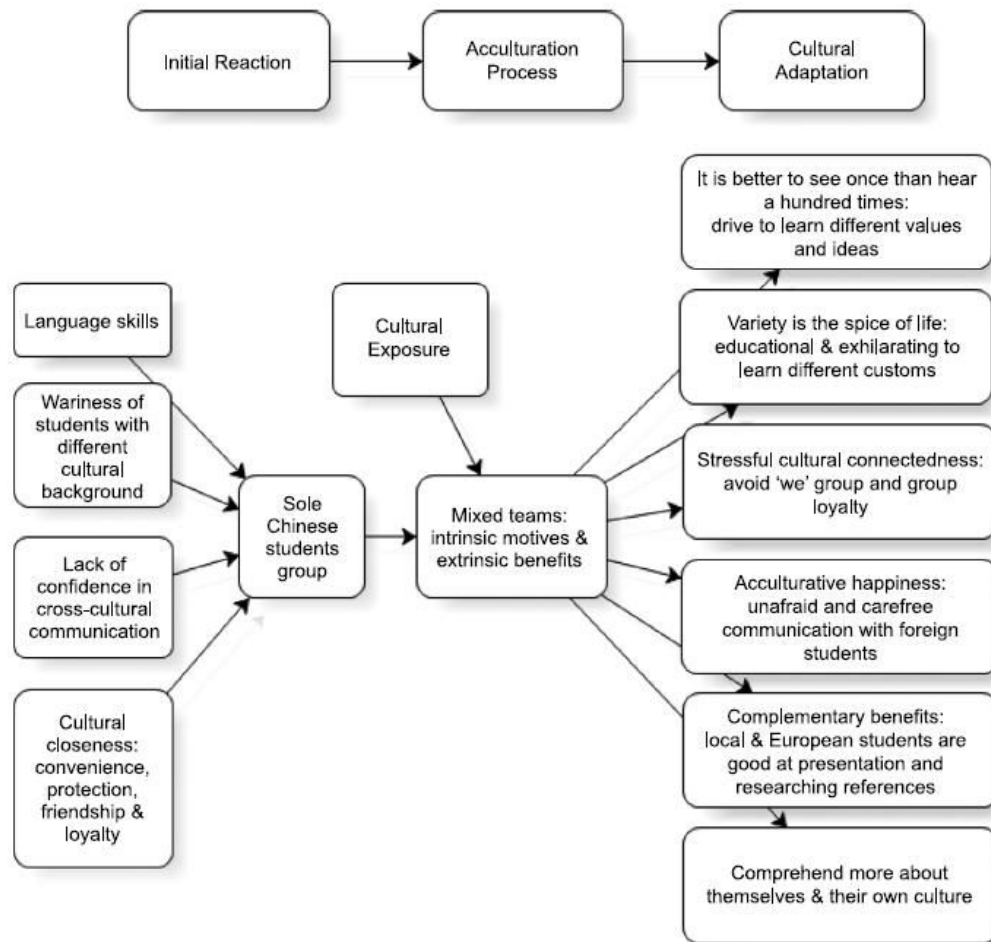


Figure 1. Preference for culturally mixed team (Wang et al, 2012, p. 626).

2.5.6.3 Exams & Presentations

Skyrme (2007), in her longitudinal study of two Chinese students at a New Zealand university, found they both preferred to prepare for their first exam through revising their own notes and textbooks, as well as using previous years' test papers. The papers were used as a reference to tell them how they would be examined and what they should focus on. However, they did not obtain the previous test papers from their teachers, but borrowed them from their Chinese friends. The difference is that one student initially went to ask his teacher if she could give a "preview" and he was refused, because the teacher thought it was not useful and might give the student an unfair advantage (Skyrme, 2007).

With regard to doing presentations, Chinese students find it a challenge to change

from the style of reading loudly based on prepared notes, or presenting completely relying on memorization, to that of talking naturally in English (Wang et al, 2012). Moreover, the question-and-answer portion which follows their presentation also makes them feel nervous. In China there is little likelihood that students will encounter difficult questions after their presentations, because the audience wants to save the presenter's face in case he or she fails to give an answer (Wang et al, 2012).

2.5.7 Discrimination

It is clear that discriminatory experiences in host countries have a direct negative effect on international students' adaptation and sense of belonging (Glass & Westmont, 2013). They may feel depressed by the new society and people, and thus lose their motivation to achieve academic success and cross-cultural communication (Jung, Hecht & Wadsworth, 2007; Glass & Westmont, 2013). Discrimination occurs both on campus, when interacting with faculty and fellow students, and off campus when looking for job opportunities and shopping (Lee & Rice, 2007). Lee and Rice (2007) found that students from Asia, India, Latin America, and the Middle East often report that they have experienced direct or indirect verbal and physical abuse in host countries, while these negative experiences are seldom reported by students from Europe, Canada, and New Zealand. However, Marriott, Plessis and Pu (2010) surveyed 122 Chinese students studying in New Zealand. Nearly two-thirds indicated that they had suffered some form of discrimination. Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) suggest that Chinese students are discriminated against because of their limited English proficiency, accent, and culture.

According to Lee and Rice (2007), the most common discriminatory incidents experienced by the students are associated with culture and language. These include negative remarks about home country or culture, and demonstrating hostility towards non-fluency in English (Lee & Rice, 2007). Neo-racism was adopted as the conceptual framework in their study. This is a new theory that argues discrimination nowadays should be examined more from a cultural than a biological perspective

(Spears, 1999). Lee and Rice (2007) recruited 501 international students who were studying in American universities to participate in their survey, and interviewed 24. Comments from participants of colour showed that they faced discrimination as soon as they entered America, and some were shocked by the negative media portrayals of their countries. Lee and Rice (2007) classified neo-racism into three domains which are “feelings of discomfort, verbal insults, and direct confrontation” (p. 394). Among the three categories, the one related to feelings of discomfort is very complicated. Sometimes it is difficult to tell whether an event is discrimination or a participant’s misunderstanding. The feelings of discomfort may be triggered by teachers’ actions and attitudes, such as impatience, exclusion by other students in and outside class, and unpleasant interactions with faculty. Often participants just felt uncomfortable about the way people talked to them or looked at them, but failed to “identify the exact source of such discomfort” (Lee and Rice, 2007, p. 396). However, unlike the inadvertent, and purposeful discriminatory implications that make participants feel uncomfortable, verbal attacks and open confrontations are more difficult to deal with. These discriminatory experiences may lead to indignation, a feeling of inferiority, and even to students’ questioning about their own cultural identity.

2.6 Summary

For this study, post 80s students are defined as people who were born after 1980 (Yufan, 2009). They are the main cohort from whom international students are drawn and the future labour force for China. Their thoughts, stories, and needs in host countries deserve to be considered as being of great importance. The current situation in Chinese higher education, combined with personal factors and expectations from parents, drive them to aspire to overseas education. This review includes literature not only about Chinese students, but also East Asian students’ experiences in America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, due to their sharing similar cultural backgrounds. These students need to make considerable adjustment to fit in to the new environment. It seems that students with multicultural personalities and local social networks adapt better. Interacting with Western teachers and students,

developing language skills, doing assessments, and handling discrimination are the main challenges and difficulties that they face.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The literature review described the cultural background of Chinese students and the various difficulties they encounter while studying abroad. This highlighted the need for new and further information of their experiences in New Zealand. Therefore, this research project was designed to gain an understanding of the attitudes and perspectives of younger Chinese students (the post 80s) towards New Zealand tertiary education. An interpretivist paradigm was adopted as this approach appeared well suited to the area under investigation. Ethics consent for this study was obtained from the university ethics committee (AUTECH 13/60).

3.2 Research paradigm: Interpretivism

Interpretivism is based on “the philosophical doctrines of idealism and humanism” (Walliman, 2006, p. 20), which maintain that society is built on the preconceptions and beliefs of individuals (Corbetta, 2003, p. 23). Weerakkody (2009) points out that interpretivists do not believe in a single reality because it can vary from case to case, in terms of the different participants and their interactions with researchers. Therefore, interpretivist research should be a process to describe, understand, and interpret human behavior (Neuman, 2011), instead of generalizing and predicting causes and effects (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Its primary focuses include “individual motivations and intentions, values, and free will” (Corbetta, 2003, p. 24).

In order to achieve my aim of exploring the attitudes and perspectives of Chinese post-80s students towards their study experiences in New Zealand, I talked to participants in depth to uncover their “motivations and intentions, values, and free will” (Corbetta, 2003, p. 24). Therefore, an interpretivist paradigm was well suited to this research project.

3.3 Participants

Two groups of participants were recruited for this research project. One was for the focus group discussion and the other was for the semi-structured interviews. People who participated in the focus group did not join the follow-up interviews in order to avoid repetitive information. As a Chinese student myself, I have numerous contacts among the Chinese student community in New Zealand, so all the participants were sourced from my fellow students and their contacts, using a snowballing approach. Denscombe (2003) notes that snowballing samples come about by a process of reference from one person to another. The researcher is referred to a third party by a named person, which gives the researcher credibility in the eyes of the third party. What is understood here is that the behaviour being examined is a social activity and it is thus necessary to target members of a network (Streeton, Cooke, Campbell, 2004). The participants met the criteria that

- they come from Mainland China and speak Chinese as their first language;
- they were born after 1980;
- they have been studying in New Zealand tertiary institutions for at least six months.

Before they took part in the research, the members of both the groups were requested to read an information sheet (see Appendices A-D), and sign a consent form written in Chinese, which described what this research was about.

3.4.1 Participants of the focus group

Four Chinese postgraduate students were involved in the focus group. Two of them came to New Zealand after completing their Bachelor's degree in China, while the other two participants were cooperation program students who had had undergraduate experiences in New Zealand within the previous three years. Their detailed information is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Information on focus group participants

	Gender	Age	Disciplines	Where	Years in NZ
St 1	male	24	Applied language studies	University	1
St 2	female	25	Communication	University	3
St 3	male	24	Accounting	University	3
St 4	female	25	Communication	University	0.5

3.4.2 Participants in semi-structured interviews

Sixteen undergraduate students agreed to participate in the in-depth interviews. The number of male and female participants was equal. Their average age was 23.5 years. They were studying a variety of disciplines at polytechnics or universities and there were 5 cooperation program students involved. Most of them had been in New Zealand for less than 4 years, while only one participant had lived in this country for more than 8 years. Table 2 below provides the details.

Table 2. Information on interview participants

	Gender	Age	Discipline	Where	Tertiary Education Experiences in China	Years in NZ
St 1	male	27	Communication	Polytechnic	Yes	> 3
St 2	male	25	Architecture	Polytechnic	No	> 8
St 3	female	23	Accounting	Polytechnic	Yes, 2+2 cooperation program	1.5
St 4	female	21	Accounting	Polytechnic	No	< 3
St 5	male	21	Landscape	Polytechnic	Yes	< 1.5
St 6	male	23	Business	University	Yes	2.5
St 7	female	23	Finance	University	No	3.5
St 8	female	23	Architecture	Polytechnic	Yes	> 0.5
St 9	male	23	Marketing	Polytechnic	Yes, 2+2 cooperation program	1.5
St 10	male	22	Accounting	Polytechnic	Yes, 2+2 cooperation	< 1

Table 2. Information on interview participants (continued)

	Gender	Age	Discipline	Where	Tertiary Education Experiences in China	Years in NZ
St 11	female	22	Architecture	Polytechnic	Yes, 4+1 cooperation program	0.5
St 12	female	32	Communication	Polytechnic	Yes	4
St 13	female	24	Accounting	Polytechnic	Yes, 2+2 cooperation program	1.5
St 14	male	21	Computing	Polytechnic	No	3.5
St 15	male	25	Business	Polytechnic	No	2
St 16	female	21	Accounting	University	No	1

3.4 Research methods

The research methods are qualitative. This limited the number of participants, but enabled the researcher to explore the participants' perspectives in depth in order to see the reality of social actions through their eyes (Corbetta, 2003). Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) also indicated that "qualitative researchers are more interested in understanding the particular than the general and in issues of meaning than in precise numerical descriptions" (p. 80). A focus group and the follow-up semi-structured interviews were adopted to collect the data. Mandarin was used by me and the participants for most of the time during the data collection process. The fact that both of the parties shared the same language enabled the interactions to be conducted in a natural environment, so that participants could express themselves easily. The only exception was that one student, in the follow-up interview, required the interview to be held in English, because he was confident about his language proficiency and insisted that speaking English made him more logical. The focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews were all recorded on the researcher's mobile phone with the permission of the participants. The interviews were then transcribed by me.

3.4.1 Focus group

Generally, a focus group interview is used to provide a source of preliminary data, particularly when the researcher does not have enough knowledge about the selected population (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). However, the researcher in this study belongs to the target cohort. Therefore, the primary aims here for conducting the focus group were to gain a general understanding of the Chinese students' perceptions about studying in New Zealand tertiary institutions, from the perspective of the group's participants rather than only on the basis of my cultural background and experiences (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005), and then to refine questions for the following semi-structured interviews.

The focus group was conducted for approximately 90 minutes in a private room. Beforehand, the participants had been offered a Chinese version of the main areas that would be discussed in the group. This included five questions which were:

1. Why did you choose to study abroad and why New Zealand?
2. Did you have any expectations of New Zealand education? Were they met?
3. What is your relationship with your teachers and classmates like?
4. What challenges have you encountered while studying here? Have you overcome them? How?
5. What are your perceptions of studying here compared with studying in China?

I played the role of facilitator to encourage participants to share their opinions and experiences, by asking questions based on the list given above, and to ensure that the discussion proceeded smoothly. However, for most of the time, I was a listener and recorder. The focus group was a good way to break the ice for shy people in a friendly environment and to encourage participants to share uncomfortable stories with people who shared similar experiences (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005).

Nevertheless, the disadvantage was that it was difficult to arrange a meeting time that suited everyone. It was also difficult to keep the participants focused and to get them

to illustrate their opinions with examples. Some participants conformed, or compromised their opinions to match others in the group. Therefore, as Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) proposed, there was a problem for me in that I could not be sure the responses from the focus group were completely accurate and sincere.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

The main data collection method in this qualitative research project was the interviews. They were designed to be semi-structured, because this format is characterized by its flexibility within a predetermined scheme (Corbetta, 2003). Before the interviews a list of questions was given to every participant. These questions (listed below) were based on the focus group discussions, my reading of the literature, and my own experiences. However, as an interpretivist researcher who believes that no one can fully anticipate time and context-bound social realities (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) and that “meanings are continually constructed and reconstructed in interaction” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 57), I chose semi structured interviews for their greater flexibility. Questions were open-ended and modified according to different answers, and new relevant points raised by the participants were followed up immediately during the interview process.

Each interview took approximately 45-60 minutes to complete, in places that were mutually convenient, such as libraries and cafes. Similar to the focus group, a number of fixed questions that had been formulated and refined by the previous discussion were written down in Chinese, and were also given to every participant in advance. There were 15 questions:

1. Why did you choose to study abroad/in New Zealand?
2. What did you know about living/studying/working in New Zealand before coming here?
3. What concerned you most?
4. Before you came did you plan to stay on in the country after your studies? Have you changed your mind?

5. What are your relationships with your teachers and classmates like (Chinese and non-Chinese respectively)?
6. What were/are your greatest challenges with regard to your studies?
7. Which skill do you think is the most difficult for you among listening, speaking, reading and writing?
8. What do you like most/least about lectures/tutorials?
9. What do you think of group work?
10. Who did you go to for help when you came across study issues?
11. Do you socialize with local people a lot? If yes, what did you learn from them and what difficulties did you encounter during the process? If not, why not?
12. Do you have a part-time job? Why do you want to work? Does the job affect your studies?
13. What did you expect to encounter in your studies? Were your expectations met? If so how, if not, why not?
14. What is the difference between New Zealand and China as far as tertiary education is concerned? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
15. Do you think studying in New Zealand has been worthwhile? Why or why not?

The in-depth interviews ensured that I had enough time to capture the complexities of each participant's own perceptions, feelings, and experiences about tertiary education in New Zealand. Moreover, both the participants and I were given plenty of freedom throughout the open-ended and exploratory interview process (Weerakkody, 2009). I was able to remain open to new ideas raised by the participants, to ask questions outside of the 15 standardized ones and develop new discussions with the help of my participants (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

The biggest limitation of the approach was that my questioning skills influenced the research findings to some extent. This was reflected in three aspects. Firstly, I accidentally asked some leading questions, which possibly influenced participants' responses. For example, I began a topic by saying 'Many people dislike group work.

How about you?’ in one of the interviews. Secondly, it sometimes happened that I interrupted the participants to double check the reliability and validity of their words, so some of the participants forgot what they were going to say and then changed direction as a result. Thirdly, I did not follow up on some of the issues raised by the participants. Apart from those limitations raised by my questioning skills, time management was another issue. Sometimes there were three to four interviews being conducted in a single day. I became tired and could not stay focused on the last one or two conversations with my interviewees. Moreover, parts of the audio recordings were not clear enough to be transcribed when interviews took place in cafes or school libraries.

3.5 Positioning of researcher

In an interpretivist research project, the interactions between the researcher and the object of study constitute the basis of the whole cognitive process (Corbetta, 2003). This is not only about how participants interpret their own actions, but also about how the researcher understands the participants’ words. Therefore, the importance of interpretivist researchers is magnified by interviewing (Steinar, 1996), and they are inextricably bound to the issue that they focus on (Walliman, 2006). It is difficult for them to stand outside to “reach some objective and neutral vantage point from which to view things as they really are” (Denscombe, 2003, p. 88). In some cases, they want to experience, or have experienced, what they are studying and have a pre-understanding of the issues before they interact with the participants (Carson, 2001; Denscombe, 2003). The researchers’ interpretation process for the findings is therefore influenced and shaped by their cultural and social background and personal experiences (Maxwell, 2005).

I was born in the late 1980s, as one of the typical post 80s generation in China who grew up in the Confucianism influenced society, but was also exposed to the large influx of Western culture from mass media at the same time. I chose a 3+1 Sino-New Zealand Educational Cooperation Program after taking the college entrance

examination, with a view to going abroad. Therefore, I spent the first three years in a Chinese university and completed my final year's undergraduate study in New Zealand. After graduation, I stayed in the country to continue my Master's degree. There is no doubt that I am a member of the cohort I studied. My cultural background and tertiary education experiences enabled an easier and deeper interaction with the subjects which led to the construction of a collaborative account of perceived reality in the study (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). However, these were also risks. I was so close to the participants that there was a risk for me to "go native", using an anthropological expression, rather than maintain a professional distance (Steinar, 1996, p. 118). With the awareness of being the main instrument in the integrity of the research, I tried to be objective, honest, and fair.

3.6 Data analysis

3.6.1 Focus group

After the focus group discussion, I recorded my impressions of the meeting, aided by the recordings I had made. Information from this method was mainly used to generate the follow-up interviews questions, so I did not transcribe the meeting word by word. Instead, only the main ideas of the participants were captured.

3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

The interviews were transcribed into Chinese and English by the researcher, however, coding was done with the Mandarin set. According to Walliman (2006), coding is a "first step in conceptualization" (p. 133). In the first phase, four main categories, *reasons for leaving China*, *expectations and concerns before coming to New Zealand*, *challenges*, and *education in China and New Zealand*, with a set of headings such as, *communication*, *teaching and learning styles* and *doing assessment*, were compiled on the basis of background reading and an in depth reading of the transcripts before the data analysis. Different colours representing different codes were used to highlight the themes. New sub codes appeared during this process, which further refined the analysis of data. In the second phase, I re-read the Chinese transcripts carefully and

took reflective notes during the process. Some key words and sentences were added to the identified themes in the transcripts. Finally, these notes were produced in tabular form using Excel.

3.7 Limitations

Most limitations were caused by the research design itself. The first limitation was the small size of the group. Secondly, the fact that I had similar experiences and background to the participants, meant that I tended to identify empathetically with them, instead of being neutral (Corbetta, 2003). Thirdly, all the participants were recruited from my own contacts. I come from the northern part of China, so most of the participants were drawn from that area, and there were few southerners. Moreover, because of my close relationship with the participants, it was difficult to keep control of the topic and avoid discussing irrelevant issues. Fourthly, the focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews were all conducted in Chinese and information was translated into Chinese by me during the data analysis process. Therefore, the direct quotes used in the findings will have small differences from the participants' original words.

3.8 Summary

To explore the perceptions of Chinese post-80s students towards their undergraduate studying experiences in New Zealand, an interpretivist research paradigm was chosen. This paradigm conformed to my research purpose of searching for the meanings and values that “individuals place upon their action” in the real world (Walliman, 2006, p. 21). Two qualitative tools, focus group and semi-structured interview, ensured that I could collect data firstly from a general perspective and then extend to a deeper level. A large amount of interesting and useful information was obtained after analysis. I will discuss what I have found in the next chapter.

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

Studying abroad is a big step to take for Chinese students. They have to leave a familiar environment and family, and integrate into another culture and society. In this chapter I will explore the attitudes and perspectives of 16 participants towards tertiary education in New Zealand. Initially there were 4 categories as indicated on p. 35 but subsequent revision of the material resulted in the identification of three main categories, as follows:

- Students' reasons for leaving China,
- Challenges faced by students in the New Zealand education system,
- Advantages and disadvantages of education in China and New Zealand.

4.2 Students' reasons for leaving China

Confucius (2002) said that young people should not travel far when their parents are alive. Although this maxim is becoming less popular as time passes, it still exists in Chinese minds. Therefore, for these students and their families there will be much trepidation. All parties will have expectations and assumptions regarding the students' plans.

According to the participants in this study, there are three reasons which contribute to students' decisions to study in another country. These are failure to gain entry to Chinese universities, future opportunities, and parental expectations. The first was the most influential factor for the 16 participants. Eight failed or did not do very well, or did not attempt the college entrance examination in China. Those who failed, or who did not take the entry exam lost the opportunity for further study, while others who were not satisfied with their scores could not go to the elite schools they wished to enter. As indicated in the literature review, this would limit their career prospects. Therefore, going abroad seemed to be the only choice for them if they wanted to continue with their education at tertiary level. As student 8 said, *I failed the exam and I felt a lot of pressure. I really didn't want to do it again. Then I thought of going*

abroad. Student 15: *I knew I couldn't get a good result in the exam, so I just gave up. My parents suggested I applied for foreign universities. I thought about it and made the final decision.* Student 16: *The result disappointed me. It was good but didn't meet my expectations. I began to consider another way out – studying abroad.*

The second motivation comes from students' future goals. Two of them believed that studying abroad provided an opportunity to learn new things and broaden their horizons, which would be good for their careers. Student 5: *I thought Western education would be better: more focus on practice.* Student 11: *I like architecture. I thought studying it abroad would be better than in China, because I could get enlightenment in creative thinking.*

The other two participants were not satisfied with their current situations and wanted a change. Student 6: *I didn't enjoy my studies in Beijing Foreign Studies University. I thought that even in such a prestigious school, if I couldn't be the top student, I would not be competitive in the job market. But if I had an overseas educational background, that would be another story. I also wanted to experience life that before, I could only see in the movies and TV dramas.* Student 12: *I worked for a period after graduation. The day job for me was just a routine. I couldn't see any hope. And I could imagine what my life in twenty or thirty years' time would look like. So I wanted to try another life and culture.*

Student 2 mentioned that going abroad was his parents' decision. He did exactly what they expected. *It was my father's decision. I wouldn't say no, plus I like adventures, so I came* (Student 2). Although only one participant talked about parental influence, this might reflect the experiences of others.

4.2.1 Reasons for choosing New Zealand

After consultation and comparison, New Zealand became the final choice for these Chinese students. The reasons for this can be divided into two main categories. One is

not concerned with education, and includes good natural environment, stable social environment, cheaper expenses, easier to immigrate, and having relatives or friends here. The other category of reasons is related to education. Five participants joined the Sino-New Zealand education cooperation programme, so they came to New Zealand after two years of study in China. There are also other reasons that influenced participants' decisions. For three students, their first choice was Australia, but two of them were rejected due to their poor IELTS scores, and the other was disappointed in Australian tertiary education after studying there for two years. New Zealand is situated near Australia, so it was included in the primary choice. *I attended the Sino-Australia cooperative programme at university, but I couldn't meet the qualification of getting 6 in IELTS, which was not required by the school in New Zealand. So I gave up on Australia and chose New Zealand (Student 9). I spent two years in Australia before coming here. I was dissatisfied with the education there: lots of Chinese students in class and few communication chances with teachers. So when the immigration policy changed to make it more difficult to stay, I also considered making a change (Student 15).* Of interest is that one participant said she chose New Zealand just because it was boring. *Because I am a person who really lacks self-control, while New Zealand is a tranquil country with relatively less entertainment. That was very suitable for me (Student 16).*

4.2.2 Expectations & Assumptions before leaving

The reasons for why students went abroad or chose New Zealand also partly reflect their expectations and assumptions. According to the 16 participants, having a Western education and improving their English, particularly their oral English, are two key points. They expected to communicate with English speakers fluently, and to experience a different educational philosophy which pays attention to critical thinking and creativity. Student 1: *I was not a good student when I was in China, but it doesn't mean I'm not able to be. It's just because Chinese education is not for me.* Student 4: *I have seen many movies and dramas describing life in Western universities, such as High School Musical, so I looked forward to starting my colorful campus life in New*

Zealand. Student 6: I hoped teachers could be strict with me, although this means I have to study very hard, I will really learn something useful.

A number of participants expected a change as they mentioned in the reasons for why they went abroad. They wanted to forget the disappointment of failing the entrance examination, or the dissatisfaction with their current education or life in a new environment.

English and separation from family are two main issues that concerned participants before they came to New Zealand. There is no doubt that language is more influential. Although participants had studied English for nearly ten years in China, they did not have many opportunities to practice in real foreign situations. Therefore, nine of them expressed their concerns about language. They worried that they might have difficulties in communicating with teachers and classmates, and listening in class, which would lead to failure in their studies. Student 10: *What worried me most before coming was the language. My English was bad. We had foreign teachers when studying in China. I could only understand twenty percent of what they were saying in class.* Student 12: *I thought the biggest problem for me would be communication. My English was not good enough to support that. If I could express myself clearly, I believed that the difficulties in study and life wouldn't exist anymore.*

Basically this was the first time they had left home to go so far away for such a long period, so it was normal for them to be concerned about how to live without their parents and friends. *I was young when I decided to go abroad. I was afraid I couldn't take care of myself. Plus there were no relatives and friends, loneliness might beat me* (Student 15).

A few participants referred to the pressure caused by money. Their families spent a great deal of money on supporting them while they were studying abroad, so they were concerned about repayment and how to avoid letting their parents down. On the

other hand, this also seems to be a motivation that drives participants to study hard.

4.3 Challenges faced by students in the New Zealand education system

Once the Chinese students arrived in New Zealand they encountered a number of challenges in the education system. According to this study, these can be broadly classified into the following categories:

- Choosing the subjects in which the participants wish to major;
- Communication with teachers and fellow students;
- Teaching & Learning styles: class styles and teachers, performance in class, and performance after class;
- Assessments;
- External factors: life, work, and discrimination.

After discussing these challenges, whether participants felt it was worth studying in New Zealand or not will also be explored.

4.3.1 Choosing the subjects in which the participants wish to major

Choosing a major at university is a big decision for students. It is closely connected to their careers in the future. Three of the participants said they were confused and indecisive when they faced this issue. Fortunately, two of them thought they had made the right decision with the help of their teachers and friends. Student 1 did a lot of research on various majors before he came to New Zealand, but he still was not sure which one was the most suitable for him. After he had been in the country for a while, he asked for advice from students who had already studied at his university for a period of time, and also went to talk with different programme leaders. By doing this, he finally confirmed that Communication Studies was the best choice. Student 12 took a longer time to make her decision than did Student 1. She considered studying Early Childhood Teaching after a six-month language course, because this was a better choice if she wanted to immigrate. However, one of her friends thought it was not suitable for her. This friend even gave her a chance to experience being a teacher in a kindergarten, which made her realize she did not like this job. She had no idea

what to choose after giving up that option, so she studied for a one-year graduate certificate in English. During this period, she asked one of her teachers for advice. *She gave me two choices. One was business and the other was communication. I went to experience the communication courses a couple of times. I found this was what exactly I wanted: learning about New Zealand society and improving my English at the same time. I suddenly saw the light.* Therefore, she chose to study Communication after completing the certificate.

Student 14 was not as fortunate as the first two participants. He wanted to study Shipbuilding after taking foundation studies, but his parents did not agree, so he followed a friend's suggestion to study Information Technology. One semester's study enabled him to confirm that he was not interested in this subject, so he wanted to change his major to shipbuilding. Again he received a negative response from his family, who said that they hoped he would continue with his course. After that he mentioned his idea of changing his major to his parents several times, but each time they refused. He felt helpless. *Now I'm just half motivated to keep doing it. I mean although I don't enjoy it, I don't want to fail, either* (Student 14).

4.3.2 Communication

People need to communicate to express feelings and establish relationships with others. This process becomes more important than ever for overseas students when they have their initial contact with the new society, because it is a way to integrate. Because of the different culture and language, communication is not easy for Chinese students in New Zealand. Participants listed the difficulties they came across in their tertiary studies, and talked about their relationships with people. A number of them also tried to analyze why they thought they had problems. Two indicated that they were good at interacting with teachers or classmates. Communication in class and group work settings will be discussed later.

4.3.2.1 Communication with teachers

According to these participants, there are two barriers to their communication with teachers. They are language difficulties and sense of fear. The language issue is easy to understand. Students are not confident in speaking English. They cannot express themselves well, so teachers are confused about what students are trying to say and the students themselves are very embarrassed.

Participants have a sense of fear when talking to teachers because of the influence of the Chinese culture. As indicated in the literature review, there is generally a large power distance between students and teachers in China. Teachers control everything in class. Moreover, Confucius emphasized the importance of hierarchy and that students should have great respect for their teachers. These factors cause students' fear of talking to teachers. Even though the environment had changed, the feeling remained in the short term. *Here in New Zealand, teachers didn't give me the pressure that Chinese teachers did. They are kind, but I have got used to the Chinese style. So it's difficult for me to communicate with teachers* (Student 3). Participants who mentioned this aspect did not all feel scared, but they tried to avoid talking to teachers because of their cultural roots. Although they admitted to having difficulties in communicating with teachers, almost every participant said that they interacted more and had a closer relationship in class with New Zealand teachers than they had done with their Chinese ones.

Nevertheless, they thought that they could not get close enough to build a personal relationship with teachers in New Zealand. In China, the relationship between students and teachers differs inside and outside the classroom. Teachers keep their distance from students in class but they might become good friends with students after class, playing basketball together or inviting students home. In New Zealand, such a relationship seems unlikely. *I sometimes had dinner with my teachers or was invited to their home in China. Here, even though you feel close to your teachers, they wouldn't like to build an individual relationship with you. I feel it might be possible*

when I'm not their student (Student 6). I can't become friends with foreign teachers here. They separate their job from their private time so clearly. They don't want to be bothered after work (Student 16).

Both Student 1 and 12 said they had a good relationship with teachers and had not found it difficult to establish such a relationship. *I have tricks. The talks between me and my teachers usually happen at random. For example, if I come across a teacher on campus, I will say "May I speak to you for a couple of minutes?" Then he will stop to talk to me. Once we begin, the conversation can usually last at least half an hour. By doing this, I get a lot of chances to communicate with teachers and leave a deep impression on them. So they know me better and then can help me more (Student 12). I have built up really good relationships with my teachers. I think the best way to improve relationships is by joking. Like last time, when I was giving my assignment to my teacher to check if I was doing it in the right way, I said "Could you please spend 10 minutes reading my work before I drop it into your lovely box and then get a D?" My teacher laughed and said "I'm not giving you a D as long as you do it well, but yes, I can check it for you". I'm always trying to be humorous and my teacher even told the whole class I'm a humorous man, and this teacher always makes jokes with me, too (Student 1).*

4.3.2.2 Communication with non-Chinese fellow students

According to the 16 participants, there are three types of Chinese students. They have been classified as those who:

- Communicate unsuccessfully,
- Communicate rarely,
- Communicate successfully.

Communicating with non-Chinese speaking students unsuccessfully

Similarly to their communication with teachers, most participants were troubled by language barriers. They found it difficult to understand what was said, often because

of the speed of the delivery, people's accents, and their limited vocabulary. *My vocabulary is limited to the professional area that I study. Talking to kiwis means it's inevitable to come to something else. Obviously my vocabulary is far from adequate. There were many times that I just listened while they were talking. This made me embarrassed. Even though we have the same interests, my vocabulary still cannot support communication* (Student 9).

The topics of conversation are another important cause of difficulties. Different backgrounds and living styles mean the participants share few similarities with non-Chinese students, which makes conversation difficult. Neither group knows what to talk about when they chat. *The sentences I said to my classmates, nine of ten were about study, and the last one was saying hello. Until now, I don't know how to begin a conversation* (Student 6). *I have no idea what to talk to foreign people about, plus most of my classmates are older than me. Moreover, I don't think they are willing to communicate with us. Why should they talk to a person with language barriers and no shared interests?* (Student 4).

In addition, the participants are not sure what topics can be talked about and what cannot. They felt they had to be very careful when communicating. *If I am talking to a Chinese person, I know exactly what his bottom line is, then I can avoid unpleasant topics. But when facing foreigners, I have no idea about theirs. I had dinner with kiwi classmates a couple of times. It was awkward that we all seemed to sound out each other more or less* (Student 16). *I always begin a conversation with classmates because of study issues. After that, I want to talk about something else to get close to them, but I'm afraid to touch upon their privacy, such as family and money, I'm not sure if I can ask* (Student 3).

Student 7 pointed out that cultural differences were also a problem. She could not accept the way local people make friends. *My classmates sometimes ask me to hang out. The problem is they always like going to pubs but I'm not used to this. I prefer to*

spend some time shopping or eating, just as most Chinese will do with their friends. They asked me to go to pubs twice and I declined. They never bothered after that.

A few participants complained that there were not many chances for them to talk to foreign students after class. Both parties have their own social circles, and it is difficult to break into them. *It's nothing to do with language. Although my English is not good, I'm not afraid of talking to foreigners. It's about chance. We all have our own circles, I don't know how to join theirs (Student 11). I'm on the verge of giving up building a deeper relationship with my classmates, because I find that people still like to stay with those from their own countries (Student 8).*

Communicating with non-Chinese speaking students rarely

Two participants said they did not desire to interact with their foreign classmates. One did not think networking with her classmates would help a lot. She preferred to talk to teachers or to people who have an enriching life and social experiences. *I don't want to spend time on making friends with them. We are on the same level, so I can't benefit from my classmates (Student 12).* The other believed that to be himself is very important. He did not want to change in order to blend in with foreign people. *I'm Chinese. I have my own cultural background. If you want to have a close relationship with local people, it means you have to lose part of yourself, which I don't think is necessary (Student 2).* Student 12 also shared this opinion as she thought it was good to keep her identity as Chinese. *I regard myself as Chinese, all the time. I feel I'm valued because of this. I come from a culture and now I know a new culture. However, I'm still who I am, no matter where I go. It's like a banana tree can never become an apple tree after being transplanted to another land. Nowadays, the world needs diversity, so we must keep our own cultural identity. For example, the Labour Party's MP, Raymond Ho his main job is still based on developing the Chinese community in NZ. This is his value. Otherwise, why should Kiwis employ him to do a job which Kiwis can do? (Student 12).*

Communicating with non-Chinese speaking students successfully

As mentioned above, Student 1 built a good relationship with teachers by joking. He achieved this with classmates by swearing. *Sometimes when I got stuck with assignments, I talked to my kiwi classmates: Oh, bloody hell, tell me what to do with it. They became very happy that you were using the same language as them and then were more than happy to help me. If you are too polite, they may treat you as an outsider* (Student 1).

Some participants also talked about which kinds of non-Chinese speaking students they thought were easier to talk to, and which were more difficult. Student 6 preferred to communicate with older people and people outside of school. *I prefer to talk to people who are older than me. First because older people have experienced more, then it will be easier to find out our mutual topics. Second, they take care of me more, such as by speaking slowly, I always find it difficult to hear those young Kiwis' words. I compare myself unconsciously when communicating with students who are of a similar age to me. It makes me feel uncomfortable when I can't understand their words or I realize my English is worse than theirs. Besides, I would also like to talk to people outside of school, because unlike classmates that we have to meet regularly, I don't need to worry so much about my face even if I don't communicate well* (Student 6). Students 6, 8, and 15 agreed that talking to non-native speakers was less stressful, because both speakers are learners of English, so there is no need to be afraid of being judged. Nevertheless, Students 1 and 12 had the opposite view that they preferred to communicate with native speakers. *It's much easier, because if I can't express myself well, they can basically understand from my sentence fragments* (Student 12). The other reason was because they could learn new words and phrases from native speakers.

4.3.3 Teaching & learning styles

Different cultural and educational philosophies mean that there are differences in teaching and learning styles between China and New Zealand. Although Chinese students might have prepared for that before coming to New Zealand, there are still

some problems they had not anticipated. In this research, all 16 participants said they encountered difficulties in their studies. I will discuss this under four headings. They are:

- Class styles,
- Teachers,
- Students' performance in class,
- Students' performance after class.

How students perform on their assignments will be discussed later.

4.3.3.1 Class styles

Normally, there are two kinds of teaching styles for class: lectures and tutorials. The biggest difference between the two is that the number of students in a tutorial is far fewer than in a lecture. The participants were asked about their preferences. Seven of them said they liked tutorials more. Their reasons fell into three main categories: have more attention from teachers, interact more, and find it easier to concentrate. *The tutorial teachers know everyone in class. This makes me feel closer to teachers, which enhances my enthusiasm on these courses* (Student 10). *It's not as difficult to understand in tutorials, because it's one to one. Teachers will slow down and use simple words, or write something down on paper when they realize I don't understand. What they teach is targeted, so it helps me open my mind* (Student 11). *I like tutorials, because I can be more efficient in listening. Once I was not concentrating in class, the teachers knew and then reminded me in a humorous way, such as "are you thinking about what is for dinner tonight?"* (Student 9).

Three participants said they liked lectures. One studies Architecture. Tutorial classes for him are studios in which only a few students in class design their own work under the guidance of a teacher. He did not like others, even the teachers, to criticize his work while he was designing. *At the end of every studio we have the critical process, which means the teacher will criticize our work. I think some suggestions are ok, but if he criticizes me, I'll be displeased. Because it's my work, I did it for my reasons.*

'Criticize' is a negative word for me. Only bad things can be criticized, so I can't accept this (Student 2). Moreover, he preferred to learn more theories in lectures to support his design skills. The other two who chose lectures are influenced by their study experiences in China. They have got used to the way that teachers talk and students listen in class. Comparatively speaking, lectures require students to talk less than in tutorials. *There are lots of students in a lecture. I can concentrate on listening without thinking whether I need to say something, which is what I always worry about in tutorials* (Student 7).

Apart from lectures and tutorials, Student 16 mentioned a teaching style that she found distressing. *This semester I have a class called teamwork business. It's a killer course for me that I almost failed. We were divided into a group with 7 to 8 members at the beginning. As its name shows, it's all about teamwork, with no lectures. Before every class, on a video online, the teacher will tell us what today's topic is and what materials need to be read. Normally, the materials have 50 to 60 pages, plus a hundred-page option. Although I never read the option, I still find it difficult to finish those 50 to 60 pages every time, because they take ages. I'm Chinese, so I have to look up words in the dictionary while reading. In class we are given several questions to discuss and answer on paper as a group to hand in for the teacher to mark. I'm the only Chinese student in my group. The Kiwi students speak so fast that I can't join in, I can only listen. However, I'm also afraid I'll lose marks if I don't talk. So every time I force myself to say something, but sometimes they can't understand me. At the end, I didn't know how to revise for the exam. There are no notes in class and I don't finish the reading materials every time. I had to borrow my Chinese friend's summaries from another group, because I feel Kiwis are unwilling to share these with others.*

4.3.3.2 Teachers

Teachers greatly influence their students' performance. Almost every participant who mentioned their favourite teachers in the interviews talked about their humour. Humorous teachers make obscure theories vivid and keep them awake. Moreover, this

kind of teacher makes participants feel they are easy to approach and interact with. Only Student 8 indicated that she did not like humorous teachers because she had often been in a situation where everybody in the class laughed at the teacher's joke but she could not understand, which really embarrassed her. Perhaps Student 6's words can represent the thoughts of many Chinese students. *I think the serious teachers who keep on teaching in class are best for me, because this is the type closest to Chinese teachers. However, I like humorous teachers most, because they let me enjoy the class. Sometimes if I couldn't understand the teacher's joke but everyone was laughing, I would laugh too, although it was stupid. I don't want to be isolated and lose face.*

From the participants' feedback, it can be perceived that good teachers aroused students' enthusiasm for study. Some universities employ part-time teachers who have experience in relevant areas to improve the practical component. It is good for students to know the real world but this teaching job is not their full-time one. Universities cannot guarantee the quality of every part-time teacher. If the teachers are not responsible, the consequences will be very bad. A few of the students had reservations about the ability of some of the teachers, particularly those who taught part time. *I had a programming class from 5:30pm to 8:30pm but the teacher hardly gave me any useful information in the three hours. He did nothing except read power points for two hours and then went to have his dinner. However, in exams he required our deeper understanding instead of just copying power points. How ridiculous! I passed this paper only because of my self-study* (Student 14). In terms of good teachers, Student 9 said he came across one who was very responsible, who gave him faith in study. Once he only got 22 of 100 in an exam. This teacher identified his difficulties and provided after-school tutoring for him. Moreover, he said this teacher was always patient when listening to him, even though his oral English was poor. All of these factors encouraged him to study hard. At the end of the semester, he got an A on this course.

4.3.3.3 Students' performance in class

According to the participants' answers, there are three categories related to students' performance in class. They are: listening, speaking, and taking notes. The first two caused the biggest problem for students.

Listening

In terms of performance in class, listening is of crucial importance, both in China and New Zealand. The participants experienced difficulties because they could not adapt to the New Zealand teachers' or classmates' speaking speed. This was particularly a problem when they first arrived. The five cooperative programme students all said that they felt a big difference between listening to foreign teachers' classes in China and listening in New Zealand. This is because the foreign teachers they had in China slowed down or explained in an easy way, because they knew all students were Chinese. However, in New Zealand students are mainly native speakers, so teachers speak at a normal speed, rather than slowing down for a small group of students. *I had classes with those second and third year students when I had just arrived. And the teachers might not have realized there were some newcomers in their class. I listened carefully but still had no idea what they were talking about* (Student 13). Moreover, Students 3 and 8 said they always kept quiet when teachers asked the class whether they understood or not.

New Zealand is a bicultural and multi-ethnic country, which not only has students but also teachers from all over the world. They speak with the accent of their own country. This is another reason that participants experienced difficulties in listening. According to our participants, Indian and Thai teachers' accents are the most difficult to follow. Three architecture students also mentioned that the use of terminology made it difficult for them to understand in class. *At first I didn't even know what architecture was, let alone those long and complicated words* (Student 2).

Apart from language issues, the teaching and learning approaches also impact on

Chinese students' listening in class. Some teachers are not very logical. Their lectures do not seem to hang together. This might be only a minor problem if they spoke Chinese, but participants have no time to organize teachers' words while trying to understand English. *Some of my teachers like to jump between different topics with only a few words or sentences to summarize their key points. If you miss something and it is actually so easy for me to do that, you will feel confused during the whole class* (Student 12).

Some participants responded that they had listening issues in class because their learning methods were wrong. *At first I listened to teachers word by word. If I didn't understand one word, I would stop to think, so I missed all the following words. Now I learn to catch the points and don't try to understand every word, so I've been following better* (Student 13). Both Students 4 and 9 said they were unable to concentrate well in classes. This situation always existed but it was not a major problem when they studied in China, because the teachers spoke Chinese, so they could easily catch up whenever they wanted. However, in New Zealand, being distracted for a couple of minutes means that they lose the whole class for them. *Every time before class I told myself "today you have to listen carefully", but I still couldn't control myself. Once I was found by the teacher playing with a mobile phone in class. He called my name and warned me in public. I felt so embarrassed about losing face that I didn't want to listen to his class any more* (Student 4).

There was no easy solution to their listening difficulties: students simply learnt to adjust over time. Some took half a year and some took longer, or even still have such issues. Only Students 10 and 16 had other solutions. One went back to study language again and one listened to the class recordings at home. Student 10: *I thought about my situation very carefully after one semester: I had failed a paper. If I keep having difficulties in listening, I'll fail more in the following years. It takes half a year to retake one paper. If I have that time, I might as well improve my English first. After the interview, the teacher said I should take the level 4 class. I felt really good in that*

class because I could understand everything the teachers told me, so I was encouraged and improved a lot. Student 16: I'm lucky that teachers post every class recording online. So if I missed something or couldn't understand my Indian teacher's words in class, I would repeat the recordings again and again until I got it.

Speaking

Unlike in China, speaking holds an important position in class in New Zealand. Therefore, participants' difficulties are partly caused by cultural differences, and not just by language. Of the 16 participants, 14 said that they would not ask or answer questions in class. The combination of culture, nervousness, and language difficulties prevent them from doing so. In terms of culture, participants thought it was not polite to interrupt teachers because of their own problems, and they were also not used to speaking in public. Only two said that they spoke regularly in class. This depends to a large extent on personality, but is influenced by other reasons as well. Student 1 did not go to high school in China, while Student 15 had a specific goal of talking more to improve his English. *I always tell my friends that I was so lucky I didn't go to a Chinese high school. I've got many friends who went to a Chinese high school before they came here, and I found them very reserved and they never talk in class. For me, I am never nervous or embarrassed when talking in the class, rather, I'm motivated (Student 1). I make jokes with teachers and avoid sitting together with Chinese students in class. I hope I have more time to speak English every day (Student 15).*

A number of participants who did not want to ask or answer questions in class said they could accept group discussion. First, because they would rather speak in groups than in front of the whole class, and secondly, it is a good chance to get to know their foreign classmates. The others who showed their dislike for group discussions in class had two reasons. One is because they are accustomed to accepting knowledge from teachers passively. Group discussions cannot give them only the right answers that they want. *I had a paper in the first semester where I didn't get a very good mark. That was because class discussion occupied a lot of time and the teacher talked very*

little in class. After the discussions, I still didn't know what the right answer was, so how could I perform well in exams? (Student 4). The other reason is that they thought group discussions were useless for learning as students usually digress from their topics and begin to chat. In addition, Chinese students prefer to sit together in class. While discussing, they are in a group and no one wants to be the first one to express his own ideas. They use Chinese while talking; therefore, there is no opportunity to exchange ideas or to improve their English.

Taking notes

The last point for students' performance in class is taking notes. On one hand, participants who mentioned this hoped that teachers would write on the board so that they could take notes. If teachers did not write, they felt that it was too difficult for them to listen, then understand and translate into their own words to write it down. On the other hand, teachers' board-writing also caused problems. Some participants responded that their teachers wrote all over the board, which made it difficult to find information, and their handwriting was hard to read.

4.3.3.4 Students' performance after class

Students in this study identified three different learning approaches. They are: getting help, previewing, and time management. I will start with how students get help when they have problems with their studies.

Getting help

Participants mentioned three approaches they adopted when they needed help. The first is asking teachers for help. They believed that teachers could give them more straightforward and accurate answers than their classmates. *Even for a small question that can be explained in one or two sentences, I will go to ask the teachers. I don't trust the answer from my classmates. Sometimes, I have doubts about what teachers tell me, but I'll try to understand. I don't think I'm qualified to question my teachers* (Student 6). Among those who chose to approach teachers for help, the majority said

they would prefer to communicate with teachers on study issues by email. Two reasons led to this situation. One is the language barrier. They had difficulties in expressing themselves or could not understand their teachers' explanation completely if talking face to face. Using emails allows them time to think, check, and comprehend. *Once I asked my teacher a question; she told me a lot but it was not the answer that I expected. I thought it was my fault that I didn't make myself clear, so I gave up at that time and sent her an email from home* (Student 3). The other reason is because participants thought if they asked a question by email, the teacher would also respond in the same way. Then they could look back on the answer in case they forgot something, as could happen if they were talking to the teacher face to face. Student 15 also said that he liked to ask teachers, but if he did not do well on some courses he would feel too embarrassed to see his teachers and would then go to his classmates for help.

The second way that participants chose to solve problems is by asking their Chinese classmates. They could discuss the problem in Chinese to achieve easier and better understanding. Moreover, if none of them knew the answer, they could go to ask the teacher together. Being accompanied by someone made them feel more comfortable and confident when communicating with their teachers.

The final solution is that participants attempted to solve their own problems. Some did this because they were used to solving problems alone instead of getting help from others. *I think that what others tell me is not mine. I should think for myself and understand in my way during the learning process* (Student 2). Others might be lost in class so that they did not know how to ask for help, and settled for reviewing textbooks and power point presentations by themselves.

Previewing

Students know that previewing before class would be good for their studies, but not too many did this. In the interviews, only three participants said they began to preview

during the first semester in college because they had great difficulty with listening. *If I previewed, I could catch the key words from teachers' speaking, which would make my listening much easier* (Student 3). However, two of them stopped doing this after they gradually adapted to and understood more in class. Student 12 persisted, but she thought it would be more efficient if teachers could give students their power point slides before class to let them know what the focus was.

Time

Time management is a big problem for Chinese students, because they do not have much individual study time to arrange in China. Participants indicated that in New Zealand they had plenty of time for self-study after class but they wasted a great deal of it. *I couldn't fully use my time, definitely no. I spent a lot of time in the library, but watched the sports news and live matches rather than studied* (Student 15). Many of them used “delay” to describe their behavior. They were not motivated to write their assignments or review until the last couple of days before due dates or exams. This procrastination resulted in two bad consequences: that they were extremely busy when two or three assignments and exams came together, and there was no time for their assignments to be proofread to guarantee the quality. *Once we had eight days to prepare for our exam. I thought I should be studying all those days but the truth was, I began on the last day. It was too late and I couldn't remember the terminology, so I wasted a lot of time on describing a word that I wanted to use in the exam. The same situation happened in my assignments as well. 1500 words, I began to write on the last day and worked the whole night to finish it. Now I have developed the habit: it's inefficient if I do something earlier* (Student 16). Student 4 said she completed assignments at least three or four days earlier at first, but now she could not do so until the final day, because the assignments had become so difficult that she needed to discuss them with her Chinese classmates. She could not begin to write until they did, and most of them were procrastinating. Sometimes participants could overcome their procrastination by making appointments for proofreading with tutors in the learning centre. The appointment time was like an earlier deadline that stimulated them to

complete their assignment.

4.3.4 Assessments

If having problems with communication and teaching and learning styles influences students' marks indirectly, assessments are directly related to their marks. There are four aspects of assignments included in this study. They are: academic writing, group work, exams, and presentations. Participants encountered the most difficulties in academic writing.

4.3.4.1 Academic writing

Academic writing in English was a completely new area for all the participants when they first entered New Zealand tertiary institutions. They encountered numerous difficulties and still struggle with the demands of academic writing. The participants said that initially they did not know what the essential requirements of academic writing were. Moreover, teachers did not talk much about this in class, because they presumed that students at this level should already know. The biggest problems were genre and referencing. Different genres, like essays, reports, and proposals, have their own formats. If samples were given it helped, but if they were not, students became very confused. *We have a lot of writing work. But I didn't take those basic writing courses because of the credit transfer system between China and New Zealand. This means I started the advanced courses from a lower level. In the first half a year, I felt everything I wrote was wrong, such as punctuation, structures, abbreviations, and the use of 'I' (Student 9).* Student 9 also specifically put forward that the literature review was the most difficult genre for him, because it required students to completely understand the opinions of others, and then to organize and express these in their own words.

Referencing was a problem to the participants for two reasons. One is the APA style. It is so complicated that students spend a long time before they gain proficiency. The other is that sometimes Chinese students do not realize they should give references.

They believed that factors like history, events, and quotes they know are basic common sense, so there is no need to provide references for these in China. However, in New Zealand every theory the students cite must be supported by a reference. *When I set out my opinions, my teacher often kept asking me how I got this. In my view, it's obvious. I do not need to explain more or give any reference. So I said it was my experience, but he still required me to find some information to support it. I try to understand what teachers want, but there is always something I cannot cover. Whenever they ask me "how did you get this?" I feel depressed and find it difficult to continue* (Student 6). *Once I thought I did a very good report. But just because I missed a reference, I got a C-. After that I spent more time to do my reference list* (Student 2).

Apart from genre and referencing, writing style, paraphrasing, and written language were also problems that a few participants had when they were not very familiar with the rules of academic writing. Students 1 and 9 said that writing in China and New Zealand was completely different. In China, they never stated their opinions directly instead, they wrote more indirectly. However, in New Zealand, students are required to put their topic sentences at the beginning of a paragraph. Student 3 said she did not know how to paraphrase and quoted directly from articles at first. The issue of written language was mentioned by Student 15, in that he often used colloquial terms in his writing. *Writing is different from speaking. It's more formal. This is my weakness. When I write, the language tends to be very informal* (Student 15).

The participants overcame these basic problems by asking learning centres for help, or by using Google. However, there are still further difficulties they found hard to solve. The most common of these among the participants is that they cannot express themselves clearly. Six of them said their sentences often did not make sense, or were hard to understand. This is partly because they are not proficient in English, and partly because they write in English but think in Chinese. Teachers are not familiar with the Chinese way of thinking, so they are unable to understand. *Compared with Chinese,*

writing in English takes me a long time, because it's really hard to make my opinions clear. I always have to look something up in the dictionary (Student 2). I try to express myself like a native speaker, but I can't get rid of my Chinese mind. Therefore, sometimes neither Kiwis nor Chinese can understand my words (Student 6).

Students' inexperience with critiquing texts gave rise to difficulties. They do not usually have a deeper understanding of topics and they can only engage in superficial discussions. In addition students are taught not to query theories in books in China. They never thought they would be asked to be critical in their writing, but this is what New Zealand teachers emphasize. *We always do reflections, but it's difficult for me to say a book is rubbish because deep in my mind I believe if a book can be published, it must be so perfect that it can't be criticized, at least not by me (Student 1).* Five participants said grammar was a barrier in their writing. They did not study much English grammar in China. When they came to an English speaking country, this issue became more obvious, but they were unable to improve their grammar in a short period of time.

There are two remaining problems, which were only mentioned by one or two students. The first is that the students found it hard to understand what their teachers really want them to do for a written assignment. They were given too much freedom in the New Zealand education system, from choosing topics to finding materials, which means they had no idea how to do that. Student 12 said her advantage was that she could follow the teachers' guidelines strictly and finish them perfectly, while her problem was that she would become confused if the requirements given by teachers were too broad. She once asked her teachers for help because she had no topics to write about, but she felt they could not give her useful suggestions if she did not have any ideas at all. The second problem is about doing research before writing. Students 7 and 8 complained that it took them too long to find useful articles to support their opinions. When they type in the key words, thousands of articles appear. Often they only realized that an article would not be useful once they had finished reading it.

Student 8 sometimes translated the contents into Chinese, using Google translation, to see if there was something she needed.

4.3.4.2 Group Work

Group work is a new form of assignment for Chinese students. When talking about it in the interviews, only three participants supported the use of group work. They thought they only needed to do a part of the assignment, compared with individual assignments, and there would be people to discuss the topic with. Moreover, while the participants were cooperating with their fellow New Zealand students, they were able to refine their use of vocabulary and grammar. Eight participants did not like group work, while the remaining five students said that whether they liked it or not depended on the people they were working with. I will explore their reasons in the following section.

The reason most participants gave for disliking group work is that it is difficult to manage and there are always some people who do not work when more than three people get together in a group. Students 1, 12, and 15 said everybody in the group had their own business. Confirming the meeting time and place was, therefore, very difficult. Students 7 and 8 talked about their disappointment in their group members. They found there was no difference between individual and group work because people working with them were too lazy to do anything. *Once I finished the whole report by myself. I felt my group members did nothing to help* (Student 7). Moreover, Student 7 said she did not know how to refuse people whom she did not like when they asked to join her team.

The second reason given by two students is that it is really frustrating that the bad performance of only one group member would result in a low mark for the whole group. *If a person is slacking, why do all of us have to pay the price! It really pisses me off when I do care about something, but others seem not to care at all* (Student 1). Thirdly, Student 6 spoke frankly when he said that he was not used to cooperating

with others because he was a very self-centred person with his own agenda and does not want to be upset by others. He found that he had no control whenever he was allocated tasks by the group leader. *I couldn't finish my part exactly as my leader required. I mean I always worried about how to connect everyone's work together finally, so I did more in my part. But our leader thought what I did was vague and that didn't meet his requirements* (Student 6). Paradoxically, as such a self-centred person, he did not want to be the leader in group work. His explanation was that he was unwilling to be responsible for others when he did not know them well.

Among the participants who do not like group work, three of them also referred to situations in which they were always the one who made concessions when having disagreements with New Zealand students, no matter even when they believed they were right. Students 5 and 7 said they compromised because they felt they did not have a deeper understanding and more extensive knowledge than local students to support their opinions. *We get the same education in class, but after class they read a lot of books. I don't do that, so I can't give a very good reason when we argue with each other* (Student 5). *They know more than I do. I am also interested in what I'm studying, but I don't pay much attention to such information outside of classrooms. Sometimes I thought they were wrong but I didn't know how to contradict them* (Student 7). Student 6 made concessions due to the influence of Chinese culture. He thought he was not personally familiar with the New Zealand students, so arguing was not good for the harmony in a group. In addition, he said he did not know if they were good students or not, so he dared not raise an objection when he was not so sure either.

Three participants said they would like to do group work with New Zealand students, because they could get help with language and learn from them. They thought some Chinese students had even more difficulties than they did, so cooperation would be pointless. Student 2 studied architecture. He found a number of Chinese students were not creative, and he did not like their attitude that they only cared about obtaining a

high mark, rather than creating something they were really interested in. Therefore, he preferred to work by himself rather than with Chinese students. Nevertheless, there were two students who had the opposite opinion. They liked group work if they could work with Chinese students. Language is the main reason for this and Student 11 also said she could not become accustomed to the way that local people work. *They had a clear division of work at first and then did it separately. I felt they were so independent even when doing the group work. What I like is if whatever we do, we do it together without any allocation* (Student 11).

4.3.4.3 Examinations

Unlike academic writing and group work, Chinese students are very familiar with exams. According to our participants, they found two main differences between taking exams in China and in New Zealand. The first is that New Zealand teachers aim to test students' understanding, rather than their memory. This means that in exams in New Zealand there are far more essay questions than there are shorter questions that test content knowledge, which is the opposite in China. The other difference has to do with revising for examinations. Students 6, 9, and 11 said teachers in New Zealand did not give as many guidelines about the exams as their Chinese teachers always did. Instead, they gave a very wide range of reading references so these participants still had a great deal to revise before their examinations. *There are fifteen chapters in our textbook. The teacher just told us to review eight or nine of them and then didn't say any more. I don't think this can help me a lot. I still have reams to do in a limited time* (Student 9).

Among the 16 participants, Student 16 encountered the most problems with exams. She said she went to the wrong room when she first took exams at the university. She wasted time in finding the classroom, so she did not check the questions very carefully and began to write too quickly. As a result, she answered with more words than the limit for each question. Writing slowly is another problem for her when taking exams. *I write very slowly. I have had this habit since I was young. Plus I have*

to answer in English here. All of these usually mean I can't finish the exams. She also regretted that she gave up the chance to discuss an incorrect mark after one exam. The teacher had made a mistake and did not give her credit for a correct answer. She believed that teachers could not err, so she did not go to discuss this within the stipulated time. By the time she confirmed her answer with the other students, it was too late to change her final mark.

4.3.4.4 Presentations

Compared with academic writing and exams, most participants did not think presentation was a very difficult assignment for them to complete. This is because they have time to write a speech which they can recite in class without improvisation. However, they admitted that memorizing everything they wanted to say in the presentation caused a problem as their teachers always said they spoke too quickly to be followed. Even though they were aware of this problem, they continued to memorize the presentations, because they did not have the confidence to improvise in class. *I don't know how to do it in Chinese if I'm required to improvise, let alone in English* (Student 9). Three participants also referred to two other difficulties they encountered. Students 8 and 9 said they were afraid to answer questions from teachers or classmates after their presentation. This was mainly because they had nothing to say, but most of time they were also worried about having difficulties in understanding the questions. Student 13 did not like doing presentations due to her strong Chinese accent, which embarrassed her when she was speaking in front of a large group.

4.3.4.5 Language skills

Participants were asked to say which they found the most difficult: listening, speaking, reading, or writing. Five of them said that reading and writing are harder than speaking and listening for their studies. They put writing in first place because there are numerous rules for grammar, vocabulary, and structure and it is more formal than speaking. Moreover, writing is a one-way communication process, which means

students are not sure if their words are clear enough to be understood by the reader. Reading is difficult because there are a large number of new words. A small misunderstanding of a keyword can result in misunderstanding the whole article. *Once I read an article, and the word 'orientalism' appeared many times. I looked it up in the dictionary. I knew its meaning but I didn't know it is a sort of negative word that Westerns use to describe Eastern culture, so I felt confused about the tone of that article at the time* (Student 12). Both speaking and listening can be a two-way form of communication. Questions can be repeated until understanding is gained.

Another nine participants thought speaking was the most difficult because they had to respond immediately, without having much time to think. Most importantly, they found it was difficult to make great improvement in speaking. The main reason is that they spent too much time with Chinese people both in class and after class. *Because of cooperative education, I have many fellow students who came to New Zealand with me. I want to communicate with non-Chinese students more to improve my English, but this means I have to keep a distance from my Chinese friends. I can't do that because it will be hard to go back once I leave that circle* (Student 3). *Most of the time I speak Chinese, because my friends are all Chinese and I'm not confident in speaking English* (Student 4). Student 2 said he did not think speaking was a problem for him as he had been living in the country for nine years. In terms of improvement, most participants found they had made obvious progress in listening after studying in New Zealand for a period of time.

4.3.4.6 Failing a paper

Failing a course is not a pleasant experience for anyone. Four students in the interviews talked about this voluntarily, and two described their concerns about failing. The four students failed for different reasons. Student 2 said he failed a paper at the beginning of his college life because there was no pressure about money or time from his parents. *I was so young at that time. I didn't care about wasting time and money to re-study if I failed one or two papers. And this was the first time I had left my parents.*

They weren't there to tell me to study hard. I was free (Student 2). Student 9 did not complete homework, as required by his teacher, so he failed that course. *My teacher gave us homework after every class but he never checked or asked us to hand it in. So after a couple of times, I didn't do it anymore. In the last class, he said: "ok, guys, please hand in your homework for this semester". I was extremely silly* (Student 9). Student 10 said he failed his academic writing course in his first year in New Zealand. It was too difficult for him and he was completely lost in class. *Our teacher spoke slowly and very clearly. I could catch every word she said, but the problem was I didn't understand their meanings. When she talked about grammar issues, this problem appeared again. I felt like she had already taught $2 \times 2 = 4$ when I even didn't know $1 + 1 = 2$* (Student 10). Student 14 is a very emotional person. He became disappointed with a teacher so he failed that course. *I had questions to ask my programming teacher, but he told me to find the answers in his power points. I was so disappointed that I failed* (Student 14).

Student 13 made great efforts from the very beginning to make sure she passed her economics course. There were two reasons why she worried about failing. Firstly, the course was too hard. A lot of students failed every year. Secondly, she was separated from other Chinese students, being the only Chinese person in her class. She knew she had no one to rely on except herself. Student 16 did not pay much attention to study when she first went to university because of her good performance in a language school. After receiving a C grade, she realized that she had to work hard if she wanted a better mark. *I didn't strive too much but I was always the number one or two in class when taking foundation courses. I thought I could keep doing that at university but I was wrong. A result of C made me understand I would fail if I didn't study hard* (Student 16).

4.3.5 External factors

This study is mainly focused on Chinese students' perceptions of their tertiary

education in New Zealand, but the difficulties they encountered outside their studies can also have an impact on their attitudes. Our participants talked about their problems in three categories. They are life, work, and discrimination. Among these, the life issue was referred to the most, so I will begin with this category.

4.3.5.1 Life

Changes for the participants are not only in the areas of language and teaching and learning approaches, but also include their living environment. They have to adapt to a completely new lifestyle. As a result, various problems appeared. The most common relates to *homestay*. Four participants said they could not accept the food and bedtime schedule when they lived with local people in the first month in New Zealand. Student 3 described her bad experience of food. *They only had bread for breakfast in the morning and no big meal at lunch time. I was so hungry! Supper was hearty but it was cooked based on the number of people. There was nothing left if I wanted more* (Student 3). Being required to keep quiet after 10pm also made them feel uncomfortable, because they were used to sleeping late and this was the best time to call their families in China. Students 12 and 13 lived with a Chinese family from the day they arrived, to avoid such issues. Student 11 chose to live in an university accommodation but cleaning became a big problem for her. *Sometimes I studied until night but in the early morning I had to get up to clean my room, because I would be fined \$120 if it did not pass the inspection* (Student 11).

Participants did not suffer a lot from homesickness, but it is still the second most common problem they encountered while living in New Zealand. Most participants said they missed their family initially, but this feeling gradually disappeared as they became more familiar with the environment and made friends. Later, they occasionally felt homesick when they faced difficulties, or at the traditional Chinese festivals, such as the Mid-Autumn festival and Lunar New Year. *Once I lost my bag. I went to the police station and Chinese embassy to report it and to apply for another passport. I was so depressed and missed my parents so much during that period*

(Student 3).

Internet and transportation in New Zealand are two aspects that the participants complained about a lot. There is a slow Internet network and limited use of bandwidth. Buses are often late and the tickets are very expensive compared to China. *I walked 45 minutes to school every morning when I had just arrived. I didn't want to take the bus because I felt it was too expensive* (Student 1). In addition to the problems mentioned above, Student 13 was concerned about her safety when she had night classes from 5:30pm to 8:30pm. She said she was afraid to go home on her own at night because it was dark and there were few people on the streets.

4.3.5.2 Work

The participants like to have a part-time job on the condition that it does not affect their studies, because they not only make pocket money but also gain social experience during the process. It is helpful if the part-time job is related to their major. Student 1 studies communication and he has a volunteer job in his spare time. He said he learnt a lot of professional skills about interviewing and writing the news from his boss, while working with him. He even acquired some knowledge that was not taught by his teachers. *To be honest, I didn't pay much attention to the news writing course but I finally got an A-* (student 1). Having a part-time job became a motivation for Student 10 to study hard. He even did paid physical work on a construction site, which made him realize how difficult it is to make money and that, therefore, he needed to study hard to find a good job in the future. Nevertheless, not all the participants were able to find a part-time job easily. Student 4 said she had been rejected by both Chinese and New Zealand employers a number of times since arriving in New Zealand. *I applied for a lot of part-time jobs, like waitress, saleswoman, and receptionist, but failed to get a job. I don't know why* (Student 4). She finally gave up, because she was afraid of being rejected again.

4.3.5.3 Discrimination

Most participants said New Zealand was a lovely place with kind people. Student 12 even changed her original view about Westerners after studying in the country for a period of time. *I thought Western teachers would have some prejudices towards Chinese students before I came, but later I found I was wrong. What they care about is your attitude towards study. I mean if you work hard and communicate with them proactively and in a friendly manner, they will like you no matter where you are from* (Student 12). However, Students 10 and 13 found that a few people discriminated against the Chinese. Student 10 said one of his teachers sometimes became very impatient and rude to Chinese students if they could not answer his questions in class, which made him feel very uncomfortable. Student 13 talked about two issues. One was also related to her teacher. *There was a problem with cheating recently. International students were found to have paid somebody to do their essays for them. Those cheating students are not only Chinese but also from many other countries. However, my law teacher talked about this case in one of his classes and said how bad Chinese students were. I was thinking, why do you only talk about Chinese? And what will other students in class think of Chinese students? I felt very uncomfortable at the time.* The other issue was that she was offended by some warning signs in public places which were only written in Chinese. *Does that imply only Chinese go against those rules and other people will never do so? I strongly suspect that* (Student 13).

4.3.6 Is studying in New Zealand worthwhile?

Although the participants listed difficulties they encountered, and a number of them were not completely satisfied with their education in New Zealand, they all gave a positive answer when they were asked if it was worth studying in this country. This is firstly because they thought they had really learnt something from the Western style of education, and had broadened their horizons by meeting so many people from all over the world. Secondly, studying in New Zealand brought a number of changes, which made the participants more confident, more independent, and more able to think

critically. *The money and effort I have put in to study in NZ is really worth it. It gives me great confidence. I was told by my teacher “never ever let anyone tell you that you can’t, you can do it”. I was inspired so much. Before I came to NZ, I might not have felt confident if I went to apply for a job and my competitors were from the elite universities. But now, I don’t care at all, we’re all the same (Student 1). I have begun to plan my future and think about what is good for me and what is not (Student 10). I have become more extroverted, talk with people more and have learnt to view things from different angles (Student 3).*

In addition, there is a question that almost every participant has considered: whether to stay or not after graduation. What is interesting is that more parents expect their children to stay and find a job in New Zealand than the students themselves did before they arrived. In contrast, students did not care or did not think they would stay in New Zealand. They agreed that having permanent residence in a foreign country was desirable, but they were hesitant to work and live in a country far from home. Student 4: *My father strongly hoped I could stay in New Zealand before I went abroad, because he thought the society there was not as complicated as in China. But I didn’t care whether I got permanent residency or not.* Student 12: *I never thought of living in New Zealand permanently before coming here, I wanted to go to other Western countries to have a look.*

Nevertheless, participants changed their minds after becoming familiar with the studying and living environment. Most of them said they were eager to find a job in order to stay in New Zealand after graduation, which is mainly because of the kind people, good environment, and more straightforward social network. *In the first year, I was struggling with the language, which made my study extremely hard, so I wondered what I was living here for. However, I gradually improved my language and find this is a great place with nice people, so I really want to live here now (Student 3). After being here, I find I love this place. I have made several friends here and they give me a lot of help and encourage me when I need this. I think this is exactly what I*

want, from the natural environment to the lifestyle (Student 12). Only two participants did not want to stay in New Zealand after graduation. Student 4's reason is simple: that she could not overcome the intense loneliness of living without her family around her. As a person who wants to do business in the future, Student 9 considered that staying in China was more beneficial to his development than being in New Zealand, because China has a large population with significant consumption capacity.

4.4 Education

In the interviews, the participants were asked to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of these two different educational systems. It seems that participants think New Zealand tertiary education is better for them than the Chinese system.

4.4.1 Advantages and disadvantages of Chinese Education

Four participants mentioned three beneficial aspects they experienced in China. The first one is about recitation. Although Students 2 and 3 did not like being forced to memorize a lot of texts and definitions, they had to admit that they gained knowledge during the process. *The information I memorized is kept in my mind and ensures I respond quickly when I need to* (Student 2). Students 1 and 12 thought Chinese education was conducive to developing people's social nature, in that students in school are taught to respect their teachers and to be disciplined. Student 3 also put forward another strong point: that the education in mathematics in China is of a very high level, which enabled her to deal with calculation problems in New Zealand more easily.

However, nothing is good when it becomes extreme. The good aspect that Student 1 and 12 mentioned is the most common shortcoming according to other participants. Chinese education is still centred on testing and rote learning. Teachers do not encourage students to think in class, and students become used to this pattern and can pass exams as long as they follow their teachers' instructions exactly. *What I knew was taught by my teachers. I never thought of questioning them or digging deeper*

when I studied in China (Student 11). The second weakness in the Chinese tertiary education system that most participants mentioned is that there are not high standards for students in universities. They said they had no need to study hard for graduation, because apart from the final exams, there was no homework or attendance rate to evaluate their performance, and it was easy to pass as long as they memorized the key points given by teachers two weeks before the final exams. *I just muddled along in the university. It seemed like I was not there for study but to play* (Student 10). Students 2 and 11 thought a number of teachers were not qualified in China. They regarded teaching only as a job, rather than as a responsibility, so they did not care whether or not students understood, and left as soon as classes were over. *It is a common situation in Chinese universities that we are allowed to do anything in class as long as we keep quiet to let the teacher finish his speaking* (Student 2). The final disadvantage is related to the complicated relationship network in China. Students 2 and 9 said Chinese education was not very fair. For example, having a good relationship with teachers enables students to achieve a higher mark, or even not to fail in exams. Dinners and gifts are the most efficient ways to establish such relationships. *I like studying in New Zealand. It's simple that good is good and bad is bad. I can achieve my goals through efforts. Not like in China, where endeavor is important, but the most important is your network* (Student 9).

4.4.2 Advantages and disadvantages of New Zealand Education

Eleven participants talked about the advantages of New Zealand education. These can be classified into four categories. However, almost everyone's answer is related to the teaching methods and the other three advantages are only mentioned by one student. Nine participants thought learning in New Zealand was not only limited to listening to teachers in class, but also included doing independent research, which gave them a better and deeper understanding. Moreover, they said they were encouraged to think in order to find various answers, to critique and create. Student 8 found the atmosphere in class was relaxing, but both teachers and students were dedicated to study so she felt ashamed if she did not work hard. Compared with the lower

standards at Chinese universities, student 9 was forced to study hard under pressure of the high requirements. *Teachers here are so strict and impartial. I am certain to fail if I just keep studying like I did in China* (Student 9). Student 10 said he liked the form of small class teaching in New Zealand, which ensured that teachers could interact more with students.

Only a few participants referred to the disadvantages of New Zealand education. The biggest problem for four of them was worrying about finding a job in New Zealand, because they thought what they learnt at university was not very practical. Students 7 and 9 said the knowledge they were taught was vague and general. For example, Student 9 wanted to work in business after graduation, so he chose Business as his major. However, he only learnt about enterprise planning or strategies, rather than how to start from the beginning. *We are taught what to do after becoming a boss, but first I need to know how to become a boss* (Student 9). The second aspect manifests in the lack of practical lessons, which made Students 9 and 15 wonder if they had the skills to link the theory to the practice in a workplace in the future. Thirdly, when Student 14 had a part-time job in a computer shop, he found some of the knowledge he had gained in class about information technology was outdated. Another shortfall mentioned by three participants is that they did not think giving Chinese students so much time for self-study after class was a good idea, because they wasted time. Student 15 thought it was a pity that there were different students in each of his courses, so he did not have enough time to build close relationships with them in class.

4.5 Summary

This chapter presents the 16 participants' perceptions and attitudes towards their undergraduate educational experiences in New Zealand. They choose to study abroad in the expectation of having a better education, improving their employability in the employment market, or just experiencing another lifestyle. The good natural and social environment, easy immigrant opportunities, and the Sino-New Zealand

cooperation projects are the top three factors that drive students to come to New Zealand. Most of them are satisfied with the higher education studies they undertook here. There are several major challenges associated with their studies faced by the participants during the process of adjustment, such as interacting with teachers and fellow students in and outside class, accepting the Western teaching and learning approaches, and doing assessments. Apart from these, students also need to overcome difficulties outside the campus, including accommodation, food, and the difficulties in finding part-time jobs. Cultural differences and limited language skills seem to be the main causal factors. Further discussions combined the main findings of this chapter with the literature review and my own interpretation will be presented in Chapter 5.

5 Discussion & Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

My research investigated the perceptions of Chinese post-80s born students towards New Zealand higher education. The findings fell into two main categories: students' reasons for leaving China and the major challenges they faced while studying in New Zealand. These findings will be discussed and summarized in this chapter. The implications for Chinese international students and teachers and tertiary educational institutes in New Zealand will be drawn from my findings. Recommendations and suggestions for further studies will follow the implications.

5.2 Students' reasons for leaving China

It appears that intense competition in the Chinese higher education field is the primary reason that drives most participants to consider overseas study, and the growing wealth in Chinese families makes this possible (see section 4.2). Money was not mentioned in the issues participants worried about most before leaving China, but language and lifestyle were. Only a few participants were concerned about repayment of expenses to their parents, thus feeling financial pressure, but this also became motivation in their studies. Statistics show that the number of students admitted to Chinese universities is increasing annually (EIC Education, 2011). The admission has reached 75% on average of those who sit the entry examination, and in some cities such as Shanghai it was up to 90% in 2012 (China Education Online, 2012a). Being accepted into a university in China is becoming less difficult than it was in the past, but it is still difficult to get into prestigious universities (Azmat et al, 2013; China Education Online, 2012b; New Zealand Education, 2013c). Therefore, the competition in today's domestic higher education market is mainly focused on entering an elite school, rather than just receiving an offer from a non-prestigious institute. The score of most participants in this study was good, but not high enough to be accepted into the handful of world class universities in China. As educational background is closely linked to future occupations, wealth, and social class (Sun,

2006), not being accepted into these elite universities would have serious repercussions. Therefore, they chose to study abroad.

Although Bodycott and Lai (2012) emphasize the importance of family influence on Chinese students' decisions to undertake international higher education overseas, in my study only one participant said this was completely his parents' choice and the rest made up their own minds, although their parents did make suggestions (see section 4.2). It can be inferred that under the exposure to Western culture from the media and the Internet, some post 80s students begin to plan their lives more proactively, rather than always following their parents' advice. Meanwhile, many Chinese parents interfere less and respect their children's opinions more. However, there is no doubt that suggestions from parents must spark students' interest or confirm their desire to study abroad, because growing up in a Confucianism oriented country, where filial piety is constantly emphasized (Ho, 1996; Salili et al., 2001), children naturally avoid going against their parents' wishes. In addition, in section 4.3.6, it can be seen that most parents who support their children studying in New Zealand expect them to obtain permanent residence and to find a job there after graduation. This supports the findings of Bodycott and Lai (2012) in Hong Kong, and Yang (2007) in Australia. This does not mean that parents want to be separated from their children. Instead, they have done everything within their power to ensure students receive the best education, and they also consider that staying in a Western country will give their children a brighter future than they could expect if they returned to China.

My findings in section 4.2.1 about Chinese students' reasons for choosing New Zealand are similar to the summary of New Zealand Education's 2013 report (New Zealand Education, 2013e). These include: good natural and social environments, high quality education, lower tuition fees and living expenses, and immigration and work opportunities. In my study there was a group of five people who joined the Sino-New Zealand education cooperation program. They came to New Zealand to complete undergraduate studies. However, it is undeniable that due to a lack of

knowledge about this country, New Zealand is usually a back-up destination for Chinese students, compared with America, the United Kingdom, and Australia (New Zealand Education, 2013e). Two of my participants first considered Australia and then New Zealand because of the proximity of the two countries, while many of them based the final decision on recommendations from their relatives or friends in New Zealand. It appears from their comments that New Zealand still has a long way to go to improve its worldwide visibility and influence in the higher education field. One participant thought without too many recreational facilities, she could focus on study (see section 4.2.1). Perhaps New Zealand's relatively quiet life style could be considered an attraction.

5.3 Major challenges faced by Chinese students in New Zealand tertiary education

As soon as they arrive in New Zealand, Chinese students face a number of challenges. Adjustment to another culture is a long and difficult process. Some students cope with this very well, while others fail to overcome their problems. In Chapter 4, five major difficulties were identified, namely, choosing subjects, communicating with teachers and fellow students, accepting Western teaching and learning styles, doing assessments, and other difficulties outside the institution. I found seven possible reasons for why such problems emerge. They are:

- cultural differences,
- limited language skills,
- different educational systems,
- personalities and attitudes,
- lack of opportunities to interact with local students,
- teaching styles,
- different working and living environment.

In this section, I will analyze the participants' issues in relation to these seven categories.

5.3.1 Cultural differences

It is clear that cultural differences are the predominant cause of problems for Chinese undergraduate students in New Zealand. As mentioned in section 2.4, Noesjirwan and Freestone (1979) suggest that if students act consistently with, and interpret their own and their host's actions in terms of their own culture, problems arise. These problems are first reflected in the relationship between teachers and students (see *Teaching approaches* in section 2.4.4.3 and section 4.3.2.1). In China, teachers and students always maintain a distance from each other in class. Teachers are used to staying in a higher position and having full control, and students take it for granted that they should listen to their teachers because Confucianism tells them to respect older people and those in authority. However, after class, teachers and students can become good friends and have dinner together. With the closeness established outside the classroom, students may feel more able to speak out in class. The situation in New Zealand is the other way around. Teachers keep less of a distance in class and interact a great deal with their students, but are less likely to mix with students out of class. Therefore, this is why New Zealand teachers may complain that Chinese students do not contribute their ideas in class and Chinese students find it difficult to build a close relationship with their teachers in New Zealand.

In addition, Chinese students' ingrained respect for their teachers, as well as their reliance on books, makes them appear rather lacking in ideas and uncreative in class discussions and academic writing. They generally do not think of challenging the theories put forward by teachers or printed in books because of a belief that these will always be correct. Looking back upon section 4.3.4.3, one of the participants even tried to blame herself when the teacher did not give her credit for a correct answer in an exam, and thus missed the opportunity to appeal her final mark within the stipulated time. In academic writing, Chinese students use references to support their opinions, rather than criticize them. They think that if a book or an article has been published it must be perfect and that they, as students, are not qualified to criticize it (see section 4.3.4.1). New Zealand teachers may find Chinese students reluctant to

criticize, while Chinese students believe they are showing their respect for authority, and the opinions of others.

The literature review in section 2.5.1, section 2.5.3, and section 2.5.6.2 indicated that cultural differences hindered Chinese students' communication with local fellow students, and my findings in section 4.3.2.2, section 4.3.3.3, and section 4.3.4.2 also supported this standpoint. Challenges caused by cultural differences can be seen as: communication in class and communication after class. Chinese students' politeness and concern for their own face and that of their peers are the biggest barriers to interacting with other students in class. They keep silent to protect their face, express themselves in a roundabout way, and back down when disagreements appear in class discussion or group work, to avoid directly threatening others' face. Moreover, as people who come from a typical collectivistic country, Chinese students emphasize group harmony. They do not want to destroy this by asking questions in class and arguing with other students during discussions. However, these qualities of polite behaviour that Chinese students have in class may not be appreciated by their New Zealand fellow students. Some of them consider Chinese students to be "indifferent, non-participative and lazy" (Wang et al, 2012, p. 267).

After-class communication with local students is generally aimed at making friends and then integrating into the New Zealand society. One problem is about topics of discussion. Although Harrison and Peacock (2010) suggest that international students should be mindful of finding mutual interests to talk about with home students, but in reality there is very little shared between Chinese and local students except for their studies. As a member of the Chinese group, I know how difficult it is to integrate. Chinese students come to New Zealand with limited knowledge about the country. Even the most popular topics here, such as rugby, pop music, and celebrities, are unfamiliar. Listening without speaking cannot keep conversations going, so both sides soon feel anxious and tired. Because of language and opportunity factors which will be discussed later, a number of Chinese students begin to avoid interacting with local

students. The other cultural difference that leads to difficulties in making Western friends is lifestyle. In the study of Lee and Rice (2007), an Indian student was surprised by “the incredible amount of partying and drinking involved in undergraduate life and was shocked with the open sexuality of American culture” (p. 397). He felt excluded from friendships with local students because he was loath to partake in the usual activities of them. In my study, I also found that it was difficult for Chinese students to accept the lifestyle of New Zealand youths (see section 4.3.2.2). Chinese students do not usually drink and dance, so they find themselves in a dilemma when they are invited to parties. On the one hand they do not want to refuse and give up the chance of being closer to their Western classmates, but on the other hand they really do not enjoy being at parties. As Student 7 said, shopping and eating are the ways Chinese people make friends.

Discrimination as Lee and Rice (2007) point out is often experienced by international students. Their study shows that it is very prevalent in America, and, in particular, is experienced by those who come from Asia, India, Latin America, and the Middle East. However, the situation in New Zealand does not appear to be as bad. In Chapter 4 (see section 4.3.5.3) I indicated that most participants were satisfied with the friendly social environment in this country, and only two reported that they felt discriminated against once or twice in public places, or in the process of interacting with teachers, but what they experienced was limited discomfort. They did not suffer verbal insults or physical attacks. However, there is no doubt that no matter how slight it is, discriminatory experiences hurt Chinese students emotionally. They are depressed and even resentful about local people’s negative attitudes towards their country and people, especially when they have no capability of changing this. Discrimination played a role in the reasons why two participants did not want to stay in New Zealand after graduation. This also supports Glass and Westmont’s (2013) contention that international students’ adaptation and sense of belonging to host countries is strongly influenced by discrimination.

5.3.2 Limited language skills

Based on the expectations and assumptions in section 4.2.2, a number of participants perceived English as being their greatest worry and also expected this to be the aspect to improve most before they came to New Zealand. Although they studied English for nearly ten years in China, applying their knowledge in an English-speaking country, as a second language learner, still made them nervous. Chinese students' anxiety about this is more understandable because of the linguistic differences between Chinese and English, and the emphasis on the reading and writing of English studies in China that were mentioned in section 2.4.4.2. A large number of difficulties Chinese students encountered in New Zealand are caused by their limited language skills, particularly the lack of proficiency in listening and speaking.

Referring back to section 4.3.4.5, over half of the participants asserted that listening and speaking are far more difficult than reading and writing. They found they easily got lost if their teachers or fellow students spoke quickly or had a strong accent (see section 4.3.3.3 *Listening*). Indian and Thai English were the most difficult to follow. Moreover, Chinese students also struggle with their Chinese accent and limited vocabulary, which negatively influenced their performance in class discussion, group work, presentations, and even when chatting with Western teachers and students after class. Their listening and speaking issues also prevented Chinese students from getting help with their studies (see section 4.3.3.4 *Getting help*). Some participants said they did not have the confidence to ask questions or could not completely understand their teachers' answers when speaking face to face, so they chose to send an email or go to other students for help, in most cases to other Chinese students. It also happened that participants relied on themselves to solve problems rather than getting help from others, because they could barely understand their teachers in class and thus did not know how to ask.

If the findings in section 4.3.4.1 are viewed in light of the literature review in section 2.5.6.1, it appears that Chinese students' limited reading and writing skills are mostly

reflected in their academic writing. This includes having difficulties reading and understanding materials, making grammatical mistakes, and using colloquial speech and sentences that do not make sense to teachers. In examinations they spend too much time organizing their language so that it is clear, and are thus unable to finish. Nevertheless, among the four dimensions of language skills, Chinese students make more obvious and greater progress in listening than the other three after studying in New Zealand for a period (see section 4.3.4.5). This is because there may be insufficient opportunities for them to speak, and they can choose not to read and write after class, but through being exposed to the English speaking environment they are forced to listen a lot.

5.3.3 Different educational systems

Chinese students studying in New Zealand face a completely new educational system. In section 2.4.4.3 the differences were compared. They have to learn Western ways of teaching and learning which may be regarded as common sense by local people, so problems can arise during their adjustment process.

Attending tutorials is something that Chinese students seldom experience in their own universities. These small classes are highly interactive. Looking back upon section 4.3.3.1, most participants in my study liked tutorials because they were provided with a good opportunity to be noticed and remembered by teachers, and they then had one-on-one mentoring from teachers. In contrast, lectures were not very popular among the participants, although this is an approach students are familiar with. They found it more difficult to concentrate in lectures, especially when they had problems with language issues. Moreover, unlike in China where students can easily pass without listening in class, in New Zealand what teachers say is very important and they do not recap the work as often as their Chinese counterparts, nor do they usually give students the key points before exams. Therefore, Chinese students find it difficult to perform well in lectures. However, both modes of delivery are acceptable to Chinese students because they are teacher centred. Chinese students find it very

difficult to adapt to the mode when a whole class is mainly constituted of group discussions between students while teachers just listen and make comments (see section 4.3.3.1). This is not only because compared with speaking they prefer listening, but most importantly, they want to listen to their teachers rather than discuss answers with other students in class. They find it difficult to completely trust their classmates. Most Chinese students consider group discussions to be a good way to make friends, but not an efficient way to learn.

Academic writing is another new area for Chinese students. Both the literature review in section 2.5.6.1 and the findings in section 4.3.4.1 indicated that it was common that Chinese students encountered challenges with it. At first, even the most basic requirements cause problems. They neither know what to write, in terms of various genres, nor how to paraphrase or use the required referencing style. In addition, something deeper is different. In terms of the way of writing, Chinese students' circular pattern is no longer applicable as academic writing in New Zealand is more linear (Hu, 2014). Moreover, when writing in English students think in Chinese, which makes it difficult for teachers to understand.

Plagiarism is a serious issue that is usually underestimated by Chinese students, because this is emphasized less in China than in New Zealand, and the two countries have different views about what constitutes plagiarism. As a result, Chinese students know that plagiarism is wrong but sometimes they do not realize that what they have done is considered to be plagiarizing in Western countries (Song & Cadman, 2013). Chinese students memorize a lot and internalize this knowledge by interpreting in their own words (Holmes, 2004; Tait, 2010). They do not realize that when they use their so called "basic common sense" or paraphrase the writing of others, they need to provide references. Therefore, Chinese students often feel confused and aggrieved about being blamed for cheating in academic writing in New Zealand (see section 4.3.4.1).

Coinciding with previous studies (Phuong-Mai et al, 2006; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998), my findings in section 4.3.4.2 indicate that most Chinese students do not like group work, because they have experienced unsuccessful relationships or earned an unsatisfactory grade. What concerns them is that in a group project they have to draw up schedules with other students in the group, deal with the relationships, and take responsibility for the bad performance of some individual group members. This is in contrast with the findings of Wang et al. (2012) who suggest that Chinese students' preference for culturally mixed teams represents their adjustment process from isolation and acculturation to cultural adaptation in host countries. The authors maintain that initially these students spend their time with other Chinese, which isolates them from mainstream culture, and then they try to understand the culture by working with non-Chinese students. Finally they adapt this and become active in joining culturally mixed groups. I did not find that transition took place in my study, although some of the participants indicated that they would like to cooperate with Western students because they could learn something in the mixed groups.

Time management is a skill that Chinese students lack, but which is very important in higher education studies in New Zealand. On the one hand, students in New Zealand are offered plentiful after-class time for self-study. According to the responses of participants in section 4.3.3.4, it can be seen that most Chinese students waste time unless they have homework as a push factor. However, even if there is homework, if teachers do not check it, Chinese students are not motivated to complete the work. One of the participants reported that he failed a paper because he gave up doing homework after realizing his teacher would never check it, but at the end of the semester he was required to hand it in. On the other hand, because of their poor time management, it appears that Chinese students suffer from more stress than Western students when several assignments are given. Wang et al. (2012) discuss the concepts of monochronic and polychronic culture to explain this. They think this stress occurs because Western culture is monochronic. Western students make plans with sequencing of activities that need to be completed in order, from the most to the least

important, to ensure that they can focus on one thing at a time. In contrast, Chinese students tend to be polychronic. They do not have schedules and prefer to do several things at once. My participants described this as procrastination. It seems to have become a habit for Chinese students not to do any work until just before a deadline.

5.3.4 Personalities and attitudes

Chinese students' personalities and their attitudes towards studying are crucial factors that influence their academic achievement and adjustment to the New Zealand educational system. Lee and Ciftci (2013) and Ponterotto (2010) indicate that international students' positive characteristics, which contribute to their adaptation and success in host countries, can be called multicultural personalities. Student 1 was one of the few who did not encounter a communication problem with New Zealanders and who also had a lot of help from them. He possessed the multicultural personality Lee and Ciftci (2013) and Ponterotto (2010) emphasize: open-minded, outgoing, assertive, and humorous. Looking back upon section 4.3.2, teachers were impressed by his humour and local students accepted him quickly because he learned to speak like they did, by using slang. However, from other participants' responses, it can be inferred that the majority of Chinese students tend to be shy and lack confidence. This appears to negatively affect their performance in the New Zealand tertiary education system.

It is easier to change attitudes than personality. In my study, only a small number of participants, who have a strong desire to improve their English skills and acculturate, displayed high involvement in class discussion and group work. They were also proactive in communicating with teachers and fellow students, which enabled them to establish a good relationship with teachers and to be made welcome by local students. In contrast, most participants were afraid of being looked down on by Westerners, so they often remained silent to protect themselves. Such negative attitudes distance them from local social networks and make them feel they are being excluded from the mainstream culture of New Zealand. In addition, unlike in Chinese universities where

two-week's preparation is sufficient for them to obtain a pass (Hassan & Jamaludin, 2010), studying in New Zealand requires continuous hard work. However, some Chinese students underestimate the high standard of New Zealand education and do not pay enough attention to their studies until they receive low scores or even, in some cases, until they fail a paper (see section 4.3.4.6).

5.3.5 Lack of opportunities to interact with local students

The importance and difficulties of establishing a good social network with domestic students in host countries has been emphasized by many researchers (Hendrickson et al, 2011; Lee & Ciftci, 2013; Strauss et al, 2011; Zhou et al, 2008). Apart from the cultural, language, personality, and attitude issues discussed above, lack of opportunities is also a factor that makes it difficult for Chinese students to develop close connections with Western students in New Zealand. Referring back to section 4.3.2.2, participants found that local students have already built up their stable social networks. They would probably be willing to talk with Chinese students in class, but at other times they prefer to have fun within their local circles. Chinese students are seldom invited to join these circles. This is also confirmed by Harrison and Peacock (2010). They report that home students do not want to try to get on with international students in social situations because international students do not usually understand humour or know popular cultural references, and they think that to be with other home students is much easier.

Local students' attitudes towards cross cultural communication are one reason for this lack of communication. In addition, most importantly, Chinese students do not create opportunities for themselves to communicate with Western students. They spend too much time with other Chinese students sitting together in class, working together in group work, and living together. They feel more comfortable in groups composed of other Chinese students because they share a culture and language, while the out group members are too unpredictable. Brewer (2003) defines this as mindless in-group favouritism. Furthermore, this preference turns into loyalty over time. Chinese

students feel guilty if they interact with people from out of the group. The situation is much worse for those who joined the education cooperation projects. They came to New Zealand with a group of familiar Chinese friends, so they need more courage to break down the in-group barrier. If they fail to do this, it is not fair to expect that Western students will actively approach such a big international group (Harrison & Peacock, 2010).

5.3.6 Teaching styles

Teachers are a crucial part of education. They play the role of transmitter. Although Chinese students are used to taking responsibility for their problems instead of blaming teachers, they appreciate the importance of good teaching to their success. In Chapter 4 (see section 4.3.3.3 and section 4.3.3.4), I reported a number of concerns raised by participants. These included the absence of notes on the whiteboard or notes that were difficult to read and understand, teaching that was not logically or clearly structured, and no handouts given before class, which worsened difficulties with listening and taking notes in lectures. Moreover, the attitudes of Chinese students towards teachers' humour are complex (see section 4.3.3.2). Although students admit that boring and serious teachers cause them to be easily distracted in class, this is the type they are familiar with in China. They like humorous teachers, but the humour usually makes them feel embarrassed and isolated when the whole class bursts into laughter and they do not understand why.

In addition, the quality of some part-time teachers at New Zealand tertiary institutes appears to be questionable (see section 4.3.3.2). They teach by reading prepared power points and have no interaction with students. They leave as soon as classes are over without answering students' questions. This is similar to what many Chinese teachers do in universities, where they do not notice how much students have learnt as long as they can finish their jobs. However, when studying in New Zealand, and because of the high standard of education, Chinese students have high expectations of their teachers, so they cannot accept such unprofessional and irresponsible behaviour.

Student 14 felt he had failed a paper which was taught by a part-time teacher because of the teacher's attitude and lack of ability (see section 4.3.4.6).

5.3.7 Different working and living environment

Although Chinese students come to New Zealand mainly for higher education, equally important are factors affecting their working and living issues. The findings in section 4.3.5.2 showed that participants wanted a part-time job. Apart from making money, having a part-time job contributes to the improvement of Chinese students' communication and language skills and to the accumulation of knowledge about New Zealand culture by enabling them to connect with the local society, which can effectively mitigate the difficulties they encounter while studying. These advantages are also mentioned in a study by Cross (2006) that focuses on Chinese international students' attitudes towards their social experience in Australia. However, finding a part-time job, particularly one that is related to their major, is a challenge for many Chinese students in New Zealand. They are rejected by Western employers because English is their second language and when they apply for a position in a Chinese-speaking workplace they face intense competition due to the increasing number of Chinese students in New Zealand.

What I discovered about the homesickness of Chinese post-80s students in section 4.3.5.1 supports Briguglio and Smith's (2012) recent standpoint that this is a short term challenge to overcome. They feel very homesick in the first two weeks, but this feeling gradually fades as they become accustomed to the new environment. It will appear again when students celebrate traditional Chinese festivals alone or come across difficulties in New Zealand. Consistent with the research results of Marriott et al. (2010), my participants did not include accommodation and food in their concerns before coming to New Zealand, but they reported such issues after living with local homestay families. This also confirms Cross' (2006) theory that homestay is not popular among Chinese students. Most move out, to live with Chinese families, after one or two months. The other problems that were not anticipated prior to arrival are

the slow and limited access to the Internet, as well as the expensive and unpunctual public transportation system in New Zealand (see section 4.3.5.1).

5.4 Implications and Suggestions

5.4.1 Implications for Chinese students

According to the 16 participants, language proficiency is the primary issue of importance for Chinese students. One of my participants took a break from his undergraduate studies because he realized that he was wasting time and money if he did not solve his language problems, so he enrolled on an English language course. Limited language skills have a very negative influence on students' academic achievement and social adjustment. Chinese students must prepare themselves better by putting in great time and effort to improve their English. Building relationships with local people is a good way to improve language skills but it is not easy to do this. In order to develop better relationships, one of the most important steps to take is to keep a distance from the Chinese circle and talk to the Western students confidently. The strategies of finding shared interests, making jokes, and learning about the way local people speak are all effective ways to make friends in New Zealand. Chinese students need to remember that if they cannot become confident enough to break away from their national group, other non-Chinese students may never approach them. As far as their studies are concerned, Chinese students should take full advantage of teachers and learning centres at university and polytechnics to access help. This would be better than having discussions with fellow students or solving problems alone. Moreover, having a part-time job can contribute to, rather than negatively affect, Chinese students' studies.

5.4.2 Implications for teachers and higher education institutes in New Zealand

For the sake of enhancing competitiveness in the international education market, New Zealand should reinforce public awareness and further expand its popularity in China. The good natural and social environment, high quality of education, and relatively straightforward immigration conditions are the main reasons attracting Chinese

students. Students' dissatisfaction with courses is mainly focused on a lack of practicality. They hope to gain more knowledge that is closely connected to the real world and which can help them find a full-time job in New Zealand after graduation. Considering the teaching aspect, teachers who pay attention to the difficulties Chinese students have instead of taking them for granted are respected by Chinese students, while those who are logical, humorous, and responsible become popular. Due to the politeness and shyness of Chinese students in class, teachers should emphasize face-to-face communication and provide opportunities for them to participate by asking for their opinions directly and dividing the whole class into small groups for discussion. Group work should be introduced carefully, because most Chinese students are not familiar with it when they first arrive in New Zealand. One unpleasant experience in a group project can result in students' rejection of group work. Time management techniques are badly needed by Chinese students, so teachers should discuss them in class. Moreover, because Chinese students tend to procrastinate teachers should remind them regularly of submission dates and encourage them to make appointments with support services for the reading of assignments. These appointments not only help students with their writing but also act as an early deadline. It might be advisable in the early stages not to give Chinese students too much choice when it comes to topics. They would prefer more guidance from tutors. Perhaps options could be offered to the cohort with more or fewer guidelines and students could choose the options they prefer.

5.4.3 Suggestions for further studies

Firstly, this is a study based on the in-depth interviews of 16 participants and as such cannot be generalized. A larger study with more participants would help to confirm or contradict these tentative findings. Secondly, further studies could explore the attitudes of host country students towards Chinese international students to find out how to improve relationships. Finally, Sino-foreign cooperative education is a newly developing project which has become popular in China in recent years. There is not a great deal of research on this group of Chinese students, who first study in China and

then come to the host country with their friends. Their perceptions and experiences may differ from those who go abroad alone and deserve to be analyzed.

5.5 Conclusion

As one of the Chinese post 80 students studying in New Zealand, I understand how hard it is to adjust to a different culture. I have tried to explore the expectations, difficulties, and demands of the target group. I hope this study will provide useful information to Chinese international students who are struggling with the challenges they come across in host countries and to the teachers and institutions who try to help them.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Participant Information Sheet



For use when focus group are involved

Date Information Sheet Produced:

28 March, 2013

Project Title

Exploring the attitudes and perceptions of Chinese students towards their tertiary studies in New Zealand

An Invitation

My name is Bingyao Peng. As part of my Master of Arts qualification at AUT I am completing a thesis. I invite you to participate in the research. As a Chinese student, studying in a country with a different culture and language, is not easy. I would like to know what your expectations of the educational system were before you came to New Zealand and challenges you have encountered while having studied here. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time prior to the completion of data collection without being disadvantaged in any way.

What is the purpose of this research?

I am collecting data so that I can complete my thesis. I also hope to publish my findings in a journal article and I may present at a suitable conference.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You were identified because you are my acquaintance or the friend of my acquaintances. You are invited to participate in this research because you

- come from the Mainland China and speak Chinese as your mother language
- were born after 1980
- are an undergraduate student who has been studying in New Zealand for at least six months or has finished your undergraduate study in New Zealand within the last two years

What will happen in this research?

In the focus group, you will be asked to share your own experiences about studying in New Zealand and discuss your views with other members of the focus group. This will take approximately 90 minutes. You can withdraw any time if you feel discomfort during the process.

What are the benefits?

The focus group will give you a chance to talk about your own experiences and listen to those of other Chinese students. You will have an opportunity to hear whether your experiences and concerns about your undergraduate studies are shared, and will be able to hear about the solutions that other students have employed for the issues they faced. It is a chance for you to exchange experiences and information in your own language with fellow Chinese students. I believe it will be a rewarding and interesting opportunity, and the exchange of information may prove helpful in your postgraduate studies. In addition this project will also assist me in obtaining my Master degree.

How will my privacy be protected?

It is highly unlikely that you will be identified as the institutions will not be named. I will use pseudonyms instead of your real name in my thesis.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is not any cost besides spending approximately 1-1.5 hours on the focus group.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Please complete a consent form and return it to me within a week.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, a copy of the research report will be emailed to you if you desire.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Assoc Prof Pat Strauss, pat.strauss@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6847.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Acting Executive Secretary of AUTECH, Madeline Banda, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 8316.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Bingyao Peng ybhinfsw@gmail.com

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Assoc Prof Pat Strauss, School of Language and Culture, AUT, Private Bag 92006, Auckland.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 1 May, AUTECH Reference number 13/60.

参与小组讨论 信息表



表格生成日期

2013 年 3 月 28 日

项目名称

研究中国大学生对新西兰高等教育的态度和看法

邀请

我叫彭冰瑶，我需要完成关于此项调查的论文以获得奥克兰理工大学的硕士学位。我诚挚地邀请你参与此项调查。作为一名中国留学生，在一个文化语言完全不同的国家读书绝非易事。因此我非常希望能够了解你在来新西兰读书之前对这的教育环境所作出的预期和来到新西兰之后遇到的挑战。此项调查完全出于自愿，你可以在信息采集完毕之前随时退出而不遭受任何损失。

此项研究调查的目的是什么？

我进行此项调查是为了收集数据以完成我的论文。我同时希望能够在期刊杂志上发表我的论文并举行讨论会来发表我的研究成果。

我是如何被发现的和被邀请参加此项调查的原因是什么？

你被发现是因为你是我的朋友或者是朋友的朋友。你被邀请参与此项调查是因为你

- 来自于中国大陆并且以汉语为母语
- 生于 1980 年以后
- 是已经在新西兰学习至少六个月或是完成本科学业不超过两年的大学生

在此项研究中会发生什么？

小组讨论时，你将会被要求分享你在新西兰留学的经历并且与其他成员讨论你的看法。这个过程大约进行九十分钟，如果你感到任何不适可以随时退出。

此项调查将会带来什么好处？

它或许可以为你提供一个倾诉和聆听他人留学国外经历的机会，并且在此过程中找到解决自身问题的方法对于研究者而言，它可以帮助我完成论文。

将如何保护我的隐私权？

我无法保证你的身份绝对不被泄露，但机构名称是保密的，所以这种情况一般不会发生。在论文中我将使用假名来代替你的真实姓名。

参加此项调查会产生哪些花费？

除了将耽误你大约一到一个半小时来进行小组讨论外不会产生任何花销。

我如何同意参加此项调查？

请签署同意书并且把它交还给我。

我将会收到关于此项研究结果的反馈吗？

是的，如果你要求我会将一份研究报告副本发到你的邮箱。

如果我对此项研究有任何顾虑应该怎么办？

任何有关此项研究项目性质的顾虑应第一时间通知该项目的导师，副教授 Pat Strauss, pat.strauss@aut.ac.nz

921 9999 转 6847.

关于研究项目进程的问题请联系 AUTECH 执行秘书，Rosemary Godbold 博士，rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz

921 9999 转 6902.

我可以联系谁以获得此项调查的进一步信息？

调查者联系方式：

彭冰瑶 ybhinfsw@gmail.com

项目导师联系方式:

副教授 Pat Strauss, 语言与文化学院, 奥克兰理工大学, 专用邮袋 92006, 奥克兰

2013 年 5 月 1 日由奥克兰理工大学道德委员会提供, AUTEC 序列号 13/60

Participant Information Sheet



For use when interviews are involved

Date Information Sheet Produced:

28 March, 2013

Project Title

Exploring the attitudes and perceptions of Chinese students towards their tertiary studies in New Zealand

An Invitation

My name is Bingyao Peng. As part of my Master of Arts qualification at AUT I am completing a thesis. I invite you to participate in the research. As a Chinese student, studying in a country with a different culture and language, is not easy. I would like to know what your expectations of the educational system were before you came to New Zealand and challenges you have encountered while having studied here. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time prior to the completion of data collection without being disadvantaged in any way.

What is the purpose of this research?

I am collecting data so that I can complete my thesis. I also hope to publish my findings in a journal article and I may present at a suitable conference.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You were identified because you are my acquaintance or the friend of my acquaintances. You are invited to participate in this research because you

- come from the Mainland China and speak Chinese as your mother language

- were born after 1980

- are an undergraduate student who has been studying in New Zealand for at least six months or has finished your undergraduate study in New Zealand within the last two years

What will happen in this research?

In the 45-60 minute interview, I will ask you questions about your experiences. If you prefer, these questions can be sent to you before the interview. You can decline to answer or withdraw any time if you feel discomfort during the process.

What are the benefits?

The interview will give you the opportunity to discuss your experiences in New Zealand in your own language with a countrywoman who has shared many of your experiences. It is hoped that talking about challenges you have faced will help you gain greater insight into your university experiences. When the study has been finalised I will send you a summary of the research. Other students' perceptions and insights could prove valuable. This project will also assist me in obtaining my Master degree.

How will my privacy be protected?

I cannot guarantee that you will not be identified but as the institutions will not be named this is unlikely. I will use pseudonym instead of your real name in my thesis.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is not any cost besides spending approximately 45-60 minutes on the interview.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Please complete a consent form and return it to me within 10 days.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, a copy of the research report will be emailed to you if you desire.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Assoc Prof Pat Strauss, pat.strauss@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6847.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Acting Executive Secretary of AUTECH, Madeline Banda, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 8316.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Bingyao Peng ybhinfsw@gmail.com

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Assoc Prof Pat Strauss, School of Language and Culture, AUT, Private Bag 92006, Auckland.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 1 May, AUTECH Reference number 13/60.

参与采访 信息表



表格生成日期

2013 年 3 月 28 日

项目名称

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在 45 到 60 分钟的采访中，我将针对你的留学经历对你进行提问并且可以将问题事先告知。如果你对所提的问题感到任何不适可以拒绝作答或随时退出。

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副教授 Pat Strauss, 语言与文化学院, 奥克兰理工大学, 专用邮袋 92006, 奥克兰

2013 年 5 月 1 日由奥克兰理工大学道德委员会提供, AUTEC 序列号 **13/60**.