

**The influence of Confucian values: students'  
understandings of classroom behaviours and learning  
practices in a university in Central China**

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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 extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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## Abstract

This study attempts to deal with the influence of Confucian values on students and learning in Chinese universities. Although research has previously investigated Confucian influences on school counseling, modern business and student learning, this thesis explores how students understand meanings of their observed classroom behaviours, with regard to Confucian values. This has previously been undervalued. The thesis uses a sample of 12 postgraduate students in the central China to investigate the influences of Confucian values on Chinese students' classroom behaviours and learning practices. It highlighted in some overlooked aspects such as the pleasure of learning and questioning learning. This study examines students' understandings of their behaviours and practices and their deliberations on the influence. It explores tensions in their minds when they compared Confucian values with other competing ideologies. This has not previously been spelled out clearly in relevant literature.

The inquiry began with the researcher's reflection on her personal experiences of learning and teaching in higher education, in particular, cultural influences on her thinking about learning ideas and learning practices. This prompted a review of the relevant literature, which revealed that while there exists a set of Confucian ideas in various contexts, there were limitations in findings concerning how university students' classroom behaviors and ideas reflect Confucian values, and how cultural values shape their learning practices (e.g., the pleasure of learning and questioning learning). Relevant studies paid little attention with exploring how students understand, weigh up or deliberate upon the structural or cultural influence (e.g., their reconciliation between Chinese traditions and western ideologies).

The researcher remained open to different perspectives. I explored some theoretical perspectives such as constructivism and hermeneutics. I viewed reality as socially/individually constructed and individually/socially mediated, and took a position that the causal power of social forms is mediated through social agency. Relevant methods such as observation and interview were employed to

discover how those social constructions occur, how Confucian values impact upon students and condition their learning, how these values are received and responded to by students in turn, how students reflect on tensions in their minds, how participants understand the reasons governing why or how they make choices about their learning actions and how students use Confucian values to place meanings on the events, processes and structures of their lives.

The research materials highlighted the power of Confucian values and that of individual students' ability to reflect on Confucian values as well. Two broad domains regarding the influence of Confucian values were identified: emergent Confucian ideas (e.g., reciprocity and pleasure of learning) and students' deliberations (e.g., comparison and tension). The results revealed that Confucian values were regarded as students' initial thoughts or core beliefs, and still deep rooted in students' learning practices, compared to other competing ideologies. The results demonstrated the significant role played by students' notice of their own identities in dealing with the influence of Confucian values, and indicated that as functioning human beings, students had their own emergent properties and powers, as well as acquiring a sense of self, a personal identity and social identity.

The focus of the study concerned the influence of Confucian values on individual students in a university located in the central part of China. This research provided an opportunity for students to reflect on their individual practices in their environment, to voice their concerns, and to uncover their own deep assumptions and tradition by unearthing the influence of Confucian values on their learning ideas, behaviours and practices. All teachers of Chinese students can benefit by being aware of these influences on their students. The research results could be used to develop university policies. Also learning skills support and teaching pace might be made culturally relevant, especially when students come from a Chinese cultural background.

The study thoroughly explored Confucius' relevance to contemporary practices in China, identified some similarities to and differences from existing literature. The

thesis made a new contribution to knowledge by exploring the overlooked element of joy in learning. It broke new grounds by exploring the tensions in student's minds as they reconciled Confucian traditions, Maoist ideas and western ideas. The students' views gave fresh insights into students' agential powers and structural or cultural influences in the area of learning.

# Chapter 1 From Confucian household to higher education

The Master said, “To be fond of it [*learning*] is better than merely to know it, and to find joy in it is better than merely to be fond of it (子曰: 知之者不如好之者, 好之者不如乐之者)” (Book 6:20, the *Analects*, 2008)

In this study, I investigated the influence of Confucian values on Chinese students’ classroom behaviours and learning practices, and their explanations or understanding of the behaviours and practices, as well as deliberations upon the influence of Confucian values and that of other competing ideologies.

In this chapter, I recollect my past, describe my personal interest in the topic, explain my research journey, introduce the background of the study, specify the focus and significance of the research, and offer an overview of the methodology used. I then note the boundaries and limitations of the study and outline the overall structure of the thesis.

## My family and my upbringing

This research project reflected the background of my family history, my upbringing and my education. I was born in a traditional Confucian-style family. My father was a typical Confucian scholar and his profession was a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine. From the age of five, my father was trained in a Confucian private school (私塾) and educated by *Sishu* (四书), *Wujing* (五经), which were the core curricula for civil service examinations before the Revolution of 1911. He experienced the traditional method of teaching and learning, typified in the well known saying ‘*Read a hundred times and the meaning will appear automatically* (书读百遍, 其义自见)’. In addition, my father read numerous other classics passed down from generation to generation in my family. Unfortunately, all the Chinese thread-bound classics were destroyed in the Great Cultural Revolution (1966 -1976).

My father had believed in Confucian values and abided by Confucius' credo for his whole life until he passed away in 2009. He had educated me and other siblings not to impose on others what you yourself do not desire. Most importantly, he had practised these principles in his daily life. He did not speak unless it was in accordance with the rites (*Li* 礼) and did not move unless it was in accordance with the rites (非礼勿动) (Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988, p. 49). I cannot say whether it is good or not for one's personal life, but it was beneficial to my father's professional career as he indeed used what he believed to treat every single patient, and became a well-known and much-respected doctor in the province where he worked.

I was born when my father was forty one. I am the youngest child in my family. My father was my first teacher and had a great influence on my learning and upbringing. These influences were not only on improvement in acquiring literary knowledge, but in all aspects of life like etiquette, kindness and treatment of other persons, which were relevant to Confucian values such as benevolence (*Ren* 仁), righteousness (*Yi* 义) and rites (*Li* 礼). From primary school to high school, most of the Chinese classical stories he told were related to the Confucian legacy although he sometimes mentioned *Zhuang Zi* (庄子), *Lao Zi* (老子) and others. What my father gave me most is a spiritual fortune, which enabled me to weather storms and to gain comfort, confidence and encouragement whenever I encountered difficulties in my life.

## **My interest in the topic**

This research focused on the influence of Confucian values on university students' classroom behaviours and learning practices, and the accounts they gave based on the observed classroom behaviours. This research project was an extension of my interest in classical Chinese literature and in particular, the influence of Confucian values on learning and teaching throughout the history of educational development in China. It also drew on reflections on my Master's study in China, my past tertiary teaching in a Chinese university, and my postgraduate study in a New Zealand university. Arising from these

experiences were my understandings and positions concerning Confucian ideas of learning and university students' learning practice. These understandings had an influence on my interactions with the participants and on my interpretation of their behaviours and accounts.

Reflection on my understandings of Confucian values and university students' learning not only allows me to gain critical insights regarding my perspectives, interests and assumptions, but also enables me to make my position as a researcher clear (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). In addition, the reflection offers the reader information, which might enable them to make better sense of the study. I considered that where people were positioned was rarely clear cut. They might hold different views and might, sometimes, contradict themselves. People's views at any one time depended on the situations, circumstances and experiences relevant to that time. This consideration pointed to the uncertainties and flexibilities of the research, and also led me to verify, to challenge, and sometimes to modify my views. My positions, as well as those of the students who participated in my research, were not necessarily fixed and unchangeable.

It was this reflective perspective that had implications for my research interests, and helped me frame the research questions, take the theoretical position, choose the methodologies, interpret research materials and address the conclusion.

## **My learning and teaching in China**

In 1983, I chose Chinese literature as my discipline of undergraduate study. At the beginning of the 80s, China was just recovering from the Great Cultural Revolution and resources were experiencing a severe shortage after the destruction of ten years. We had a number of courses regarding Chinese literature including the history of classical Chinese literature, of modern Chinese literature and of contemporary Chinese literature. We also had other

courses relevant to our discipline such as Chinese history, writing, classical and modern Chinese language and the history of foreign literature.

Some textbooks were quite old, and the lecturing style of some lecturers was somewhat boring. For example, I can still remember clearly that the lecturer of Chinese history delivered the lecture like a Buddhist monk reciting scriptures. We complained about him to our coordinator in a private way. The coordinator explained to us that this lecturer actually had rich knowledge about Chinese history and just could not deliver the lecture properly. The coordinator then advised us that we might not see something clearly if we just read books, as books recorded information in a formal way while teachers had their personal understandings of knowledge. The explanations of the coordinator had a great influence on my learning. In fact, although the teaching method of the lecturer of Chinese history was not good, he provided us with a rich knowledge of Chinese history. Without him, we could not systematically understand our history in a short time.

In general, these university lecturers provided me with a basic foundation and systematic knowledge of Chinese and foreign literature, and led me to widening my horizon. More importantly, the information transmitted by the lecturers was quite new and not all from the books, and so stimulated me to discover which kind of knowledge was useful for me and which direction I should take.

At that time, we were told that we should listen to the teacher carefully, respect teachers and value their teachings. Even if a teacher made a mistake, we could not point it out immediately and we could only tell the teacher after class. I was introverted when I was a little child and always sat in the corner of the classroom. I seldom expressed my opinions in the classroom and rarely answered the teachers' questions voluntarily. I became more open when studied at university. However, I still thought that when the teacher was speaking, suddenly asking questions meant disrespect. I always felt that the teacher had planned well.

In 1997, I studied for my Master's degree and chose Chinese classical literature as my research interest, with a focus on Pre-Qin (先秦) classics. My primary supervisor was a well-known professor, who specialized in *Yijing* (易经) and Taoism (*Dao Jia* 道家) while the secondary supervisor focused on Confucius and 'Odes' (*Shijing* 诗经). They regularly advised us that Confucius' proverb 'his burden is heavy and the road is long' (任重而道) (Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988, p. 33), is not only an academic ideal but also a social mission. I also liked freedom, naturalness and simplicity as advocated by Taoism (*Dao Jia* 道家), which suggested that people should not do things beyond human nature for attaining social status.

I taught senior high school from 1986 to 1996. I taught Chinese language and followed all the prescribed textbooks to meet the national standardized criteria, as both the students and I had the pressure of the university entrance examination. Evaluations of my teaching showed a high level of satisfaction from students and their parents because I enabled students in my class to have a good result in the examination. In 1997 I started university teaching. I then had time to reflect on teaching and felt that as a teacher, I not only need to transmit basic knowledge, but also should encourage students to reflect on what they learned. The course I taught in the university was classical Chinese literature. Based on the prescribed textbooks, I divided this course into different topics such as Confucius and the *Analects*, Taoism (*Dao Jia* 道家) and *Zhuang Zi* (庄子), poems of the Tang Dynasty and novels of the Qing Dynasty. Evaluations from students were also good, but the reasons were quite different from those of senior high school students: the undergraduate students suggested that this course not only made them gain an overview of classical Chinese literature, but also let them start to reflect on their past learning and inner world.

However, I was never challenged by students. No students initiated any questions in my classes. At that time, I did not feel strange because things

were just like that. As a teacher, I had a teaching plan, designing perfectly how much knowledge I needed to deliver and how many questions I needed to ask. I finished the teaching task and did not let any classes fall behind. I assumed that my teaching was systematic and coherent. I had taken this for granted for many years until I came to New Zealand.

## **Postgraduate study in New Zealand**

My postgraduate study in New Zealand started in 2008. For me, this was a completely new educational system and social environment. In China, my Confucian cultural background, which I was exposed to, provided me with the doctrine that education was a transmission of wisdom, that learning was a process in which people extended the breadth of their knowledge to promote their intellectual growth and social advancement. I experienced a considerable number of difficulties and cultural conflicts in my initial postgraduate coursework, and was frustrated with the content of courses and the style of teaching and learning. Although I had finished my Master's degree in China, I was not offered the course of 'research methodologies and methods' and had even never heard of it. I was not able to understand what the lecturer said in the class. I then attended a number of workshops relevant to this course and still felt confused. After reading some books about methodologies and methods, I came to know a little about it. However, many concepts and terms remained ambiguous and uncertain for me until now.

The style of teaching and learning was also challenging for me. In China, I had learned and taught for many years and felt that our Chinese students almost grew up sitting in classrooms and listening to teachers' lectures. Only when our teachers asked us questions, did we answer them. I thought that this was how Chinese students were from when we were little children and felt that this was what education ought to be. In particular, I was a typical student who had grown up with Chinese traditional education and in the classroom, had never asked any questions when I was a student, and never been questioned by students when I was a teacher. I assumed that the task of teachers was to

deliver lectures and to transmit knowledge while the task of students was to listen to teachers and to absorb knowledge.

But things were indeed different now. Students often expressed doubts at any time in the classroom and even initiated questions. Teachers followed them and other students took up the topics to discuss with them. I was overwhelmed by this change and did not know who I should listen to and how I should respond to them. I was lost, and then I started to think. Fortunately and coincidentally, we were offered a course named 'reflecting on your professional practices', which was delivered by my primary supervisor, Nesta Devine. This course was very helpful as it provided me with an opportunity to think about the present, the past, my teaching and my learning. Why were other Chinese students and I quiet in the classroom? Was this learning behaviour due to the personalities, the second language or related to something deeper? How was that learning style formed? Why was it so difficult for me to fit into the new situation?

These questions became the focus for my assignments in the course 'Reflecting on your professional practices', which showed that I had formed my learning habits under the Chinese traditional model of teaching and learning; I had inherited the idea of modesty from my previous generations, from childhood. This traditional model was so deep-rooted in my thinking that I could not convert to a different learning model in a short time. And what did the Chinese tradition refer to? What did the term 'modesty' originate from? Then I directed my reflection to Confucian values.

## **Doctoral research journey**

As mentioned before, my family was close to the Confucian tradition. I inherited Confucian values from my father. But how was it for other students, in particular, the younger generation? I shared these feelings and had conversations with a few of my Chinese classmates in New Zealand. The feedback from them provided me with some initial insights into the influence

which some Confucian ideas of learning might have on their behaviours or practices. Some classmates often struggled with knowing what they wanted to do in the classroom and feeling compelled to do just the opposite. Sometimes they were frustrated that they were unable to fit their beliefs into the new learning practices, and so they tried to find ways to deal with this internal conflict.

Then I was curious about how young students in mainland China would behave in the classroom and how they would describe their learning. I embarked on the journey of doctoral study in 2009 with this interest in the influence of Confucian ideas of learning on current Chinese university students. I was keen to know whether the classroom behaviours of young students were still like mine or not. I was keen to hear the voices of young people. What would be their learning practices? How would students make sense of their behaviours? In particular, I was keen to know to what extent students' voices, classroom behaviours and practices could be explained in terms of Confucian ideas of learning, and wondered whether those behaviours and practices would reveal different Confucian-related ideas, and whether those Confucian-related ideas would support students' learning. Presumably, there might be many competing ideologies having a potential impact on young students' behaviours and learning practices. If this occurs, how would they respond to? How would students work through and deal with conflicting ideas? How would they weigh them up? How would they make choices when they faced different, competing or conflicting points of view from different sources? In this rapid changing era, might Confucian values still remain influential to Chinese learners?

These questions developed during a literature review concerning issues regarding Confucian values and Chinese students' learning. From the literature initially reviewed, one of the areas I identified where research was limited was in relation to Confucian values in university students' classroom

behaviours and learning practices in mainland China. Moreover, such empirical research was entirely absent at the time when I was studying.

At that time, voluminous research on Confucianism had been conducted from various viewpoints such as geographical (Nisbett, 2005; Pierovich, 2009), historical (Fouts & Chan, 1995; Jiang, 2002), philosophical (Kim, 2002; Wang, 2007), empirical (Chen, 2009; Yu, 2008), comparative (Ames, 2003; Tan, 2003; Tweed & Lehman, 2002) and reinterpetive (Leung, 2003; Yan, 2004). Some of the studies that focus on the influence of Confucianism highlight the prevalence and weighting of one or a set of Confucian ideas or thoughts in various contexts such as school guidance and counseling (Hue, 2008), modern business (Koch, 2004; Pan, 2008), leadership (Son, 2000) and student learning (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Pratt, 1992). The studies have yielded different or even contrasting findings. For example, some researchers regard Confucian values as significant components of modern social-cultural attitudes affecting learning and communication practice in contemporary China (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Watkins & Biggs, 2001; Yao, 2000), while others argue that the influence of Confucianism on Chinese students' learning is declining and Confucianism may not be the guiding principle of norms and values in the university settings of modern China (Shi, 2006; Liu 2004). In this debatable area, this study would make contributions to the structure of knowledge base.

## **The focus of this study**

While some studies focus on influences of Confucianism on students' learning (Shi, 2006; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Pratt, 1992), few of them do so in relation to the influence of Confucian values on Chinese university students. It has also become evident that little attention has been given to the possible influence of Confucian ideas of learning on university students' behaviours and practices in mainland China. This means that, despite the large body of literature available on Confucianism and learning, students' construction of meanings with regard to Confucian values and their understandings of learning practices have not been widely considered.

With reflection on the existing body of literature and engagement in informal discussions with a few classmates in the New Zealand university, and with reflection on my own personal experience within the education system as both a student and a teacher in China and as a doctoral student and a growing educational researcher, the focus for my research began to become apparent. This research, therefore, intends to identify Confucian ideas of learning in students' classroom behaviours and accounts, to address the possible influences of such underlying ideas on students' learning behaviours and practices in their everyday lives and to examine how students weigh up or deliberate upon the influence of Confucian ideas of learning.

Furthermore, students enter higher education with preconceptions about learning which they typically have encountered throughout their upbringing and schooling. Given the current development in information and globalising movement, students may "develop new beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviour patterns on the basis of new information obtained and cognitive redefinition" (Evans & Abbott, 1998, p. 163). Taking into account the complexities of such emerging and compelling factors, as well as the advocacy of Confucian values and thoughts in contemporary China (e.g., harmony, morality), this investigation was timely and needed. This led to the main research question:

To what extent can students' classroom behaviours and practices be explained or understood in terms of Confucian ideas of learning, and how do students understand, weigh up or deliberate upon the influence of Confucian ideas of learning, coupled with other competing ideologies?

Some key sub-questions to be addressed were:

- How do students make explanations for their observed classroom behaviours and learning practices?
- How might these students' explanations, descriptions and accounts reflect Confucian ideas of learning?

- How do students describe or explain different aspects of Confucian ideas in terms of their learning practices?
- How do these Confucian ideas of learning shape/inform/influence students' classroom behaviours and practices?

Some related assumptions that underpinned the research at the outset included:

- Students' accounts may reveal different aspects of Confucian ideas of learning, which may or may not support their learning.
- Student's accounts or understanding may reveal competing ideologies, which might have a potential influence on their behaviours and practices. Among them, Confucian ideas of learning may remain influential to Chinese learners;
- Different sources of ideologies may interact in complex ways to shape students' learning behaviours and practices;
- Confucian ideas of learning could be differentiated from others although they are inter-related and even overlap;
- Students' understanding or deliberation may or may not reveal inconsistencies or conflicts between Confucian ideas of learning and other competing ideologies;
- Students' deliberation upon the influence of Confucian ideas and other ideologies may include processes of external adaptation and internal integration.

## **Development of research methodology**

This qualitative study was conducted at a university in the central part of China. In the beginning of this study the underlying paradigm with respect to epistemology was constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Crotty, 1998). The methodology represents an interpretative qualitative approach (Schwandt, 1994; Denzin, 2006). This approach has been adopted due to the researcher's desire to identify some Confucian ideas of learning in students' practices and their explanations or understanding in a Chinese university context and to

illustrate and interpret the phenomena with regard to contextualized personal individual meanings (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006; Manson, 2002; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Radnor, 2001).

I found that observations and interviews were satisfying research methods to do academic work when I was undertaking my postgraduate study in New Zealand. Whilst I observed and interviewed students for one of my assignments, I found it emotionally and intellectually enjoyable. Despite dilemmas and difficulties all along the research process, I was fascinated with observing people's behaviours and conceiving the ideas, contacting participants and writing up the results of interviews. Although it was difficult and sometimes tiring, I never lost interest and I felt that it was a privilege to observe people and then to listen to the accounts of people through interviewing and to know their practices through their accounts. Sharing those practices and making thematic connections proved to be a productive approach for my writing. Critically important here was my appreciation of how researchers conducted interviews and how the questions were asked, and how the data were analysed and interpreted.

Another experience critical to my understanding of the power of interview was that I was interviewed by a German female student from Massey university, whose research topic was about Chinese people living in New Zealand. It was in this context that I engaged with some cultural issues between the East and the West. The experience helped me understand how to use research skills and techniques to initiate research questions regarding cultural differences and conflicts. I learned to appreciate even further that culture, language and conversation were important ways toward knowing and understanding. I found that my doctoral research project became closely bound up with my cultural identity as a beginning scholar.

In addition to the above, a significant influence in the beginning of this research was the wider educational research community. My participation in meetings about postgraduate research was beneficial, including postgraduate

symposia, faculty postgraduate mini-conferences, school research seminars, and the postgraduate information sharing and writing support groups. My publications (Song, 2012, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2013, 2013a, 2013b) made my research design and data interpretation open to scrutiny. Within this community, I was open and responsive to the insights and constructive feedback of others.

Also the literature on qualitative research was invaluable to how I approached the topic and made sense of the research materials. Scholars such as Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Crotty (1998), Creswell (2003, 2007), Glaser and Strauss (1999), to name a few, influenced me in shaping the research approach and the subsequent process. Greater elaboration of these ideas is covered in Chapter 3 of the thesis.

## **The significance of the study**

This research was worth undertaking because of its potential contribution to scholarship, the development of educational theory and its practical implications for university students, policy makers and learning support practitioners.

Firstly, the existing knowledge about tertiary teaching and learning had been influenced by particular perspectives (McAlpine, 2006). There was a need to critically review those perspectives in order to address current gaps and imbalances in knowledge and understanding (Malcolm & Zukas, 2001). It was important not to be confined to existing interpretations. There might be other equally valuable ways of making sense of the phenomenon in the broader field of education since “the purpose and nature of education depend to a large extent on what kind of person or individual we think we are and we are engaged with” (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 318). This research was built on studies of researchers who had attempted to investigate aspects of Confucianism from various viewpoints such as philosophical (Kim, 2002; Wang, 2007), geographical (Nisbett, 2005; Pierovich, 2009), historical (Fouts & Chan,

1995; Jiang, 2002), empirical (Chen, 2009; Yu, 2008), reinterpetive (Leung, 2003; Yan, 2004) and comparative (Ames, 2003; Tan, 2003; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). These perspectives were constructed to represent the different interests of researchers. When travelling through the literature, I remained open to perspectives which would provided me with insights into my research. When designing the study, I believed that reality is socially/individually constructed and individually/socially mediated, that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting, and that courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of agents who subjectively determine their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances. When I presented and discussed the research results in Chapter 4, varieties of students' explanations for identified Confucian ideas of learning in the observed classroom behaviours and their practices, and their inner world in relation to other competing ideologies led me to the literature on human agency and structure, and the relationship between them. However, this relationship has rarely been considered in the area of learning in higher education.

My research from this particular standpoint provided more sophisticated approaches, generated more complete and better explanations for the phenomena under investigation, and offered points of departure for further study and the development of practice. It also attempted to extend the boundaries of existing research on Confucian values and university students by integrating existing perspectives and constructing new ones, aiming to provide evidence to show that current understanding, realities and practices could be different. So it would contribute to foundational literatures by making connections between Confucian values and current university students learning behaviours and practices, would provide an opportunity to determine whether existing findings could be generalized from the university in the central part of China, and would have the potential to expand the field of learning research in higher education.

Second, the research was significant because of its detailed descriptions of practices that expressed particular issues around Confucian values and university students' learning in mainland China, where there was a paucity of research on the connection between Confucian values and university students' learning ideas, classroom behaviours and their practices. Understanding how students made explanations for their observed classroom behaviours and practices of learning, and how these students' explanations, descriptions and accounts reflected Confucian ideas of learning was essential because these insights contributed to students' engagement, achievement, self-esteem, overall learning efficiency and well-being. Students' attitudes and approaches to learning were significant for transformative change within higher education. The research would illuminate students' learning practices and thereby provide sound evidence-based implications for the improvement of university learning and teaching. More specific implications that were anticipated include the following:

This research will provide valuable insights into the influence that traditions and cultures may have on students and students' powers of reflexive deliberation on Confucian values and other competing ideologies. An understanding of how cultures and traditions can influence students as well as how students weigh up or deliberate upon the influence, is likely to be valuable for those involved in the design and implementation of students' learning programmes. In particular, this investigation is timely and needed when students may "develop new beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviour patterns on the basis of new information obtained and cognitive redefinition" (Evans & Abbott, 1998, p. 163) and Confucian values and thoughts are being advocated in contemporary China (e.g., harmony, morality).

For students involved in this study, the research results will provide them with a chance to reflect on their practices and to voice their concerns, particularly on some issues that might affect university students' learning. From this reflection, students may have opportunities to develop a personal perspective

in the light of available knowledge, practice, values and commitments revealed in the research; they may also recognise the possibility of improving their learning. The research results of this study also have considerable implications for teachers' teaching practices and students' learning experience in other countries where teachers are working with Chinese students. Through reading individual students' accounts, they can value the learning practices of students who have struggled through situations similar to their own.

Finally, this study could provide readers with a tool for reflecting upon their own beliefs and practices. By actively considering individual students' practices with regard to their own evolving life stories, readers may gain deeper insights into the underlying beliefs and assumptions that shape their own learning and research practices.

## **Boundaries and limitations**

This study focused on classroom behaviours and learning experiences of a sample of 12 university students in the central part of China to investigate the influence of Confucian values on their learning ideas, behaviours and practices. Unlike much of the research to date, it set out to investigate what was practised and explained by students in a Chinese university context.

Though this research focused on the cultural aspects of learning, I have also recognised that there are other aspects, which participants might assume as factors influencing learning. For example, I anticipated that gender issues might bring differences to students' practices of learning. However, these other aspects did not represent the primary focus of this study.

After mapping out the territory in which research was conducted, it is now necessary to identify some limitations and to classify related issues that I did not pursue in this study:

- More consideration was given to Confucian ideas of learning in the practices of students than other ideologies.
- Citations of Confucian ideas of learning were mainly based on the *Analects*, rather than Confucian other works.
- The emphasis was on *how* students conceptualise or understand education or learning, rather than what their conceptions actually are.
- Primary attention was given to the influence of Confucian values on students' practice and behaviours of learning, rather than possible influences on other aspects of students' lives.
- The behaviours, ideas and practices of participants were gathered within an open framework and possible trends were then identified, not vice versa.
- The study was conducted within a limited period of time as required by the doctoral programme.
- Data were collected from a sample of 12 students in one university in the central part of China.
- Observation notes and interview transcripts were used as the primary source of data, rather than other methods.

All these issues might cause limitations of the nature and extent of the research materials collected, and consequently the generalisability of research results. This might lead readers to generalise the research results to their own contexts.

## **The structure of the thesis**

This thesis comprises five chapters.

Chapter 1, "Introduction", situates the scene for the thesis as a whole in relation to the focus of this study, addresses the key research question and explains the researcher's position, the development of research methodology, the potential significance, the boundaries of the research and the structure of what guides the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 2, “Literature Review”, contextualises the present study by providing an amalgamation of the literature on Confucian values and Chinese students’ learning which informs the design of this research. It includes ‘Confucianism as a historical event’, ‘Confucianism as a learning culture’, ‘Confucianism and Chinese higher education’, ‘problematisation of the present status of Confucian values and learning’, ‘Confucian cultural values and globalization’ and ‘development of learning conceptions and situating this study’. In each part, closely related studies are critically reviewed to situate this present research.

Chapter 3, “Methodology”, first illustrates the theoretical perspectives which underpin and shape this study. It offers information about the research site, participants and the collection of research materials. It then describes the process of analysis of research materials to make it open to scrutiny, and outlines the structure for the following chapter of the presentation and discussion of research results.

Chapter 4, “Results and discussion”, presents and discusses overall themes emerging through the analysis of research materials across all participants and the interrelationship between and among these themes. It is also supported and illustrated with quotes from observation notes and interview transcripts, and suggests links between students’ practice, Confucian ideas of learning, existing literature and relevant theories.

Chapter 5, “Conclusion”, presents my overall conclusions and research results, discusses implications for educational practice and critiques the research process. It also provides a summary of my reflective thoughts about personal growth as a researcher throughout this research process, as well as offering suggestions for future studies.

## Chapter 2 Confucianism at work today and contemporary issues concerning learning

The Master said, “If one learns from others but does not think, one will be bewildered. If, on the other hand, one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be imperiled (子曰：学而不思则罔，思而不学则殆)” (Book 2:15, the *Analects*, 2008).

Confucianism has been used as an ideal symbol to usher in an age of prosperity and mutual understanding for modern China in the last few years. In the past, there were major conflicts that erupted from the anti-Confucian attitude. The May Fourth Movement (五四运动) and the Great Cultural Revolution (文化大革命) were two examples of these conflicts. Compared to the earlier anti-Confucian stance, the current Chinese government attaches a great deal of importance to Confucius as a symbol for education in contemporary China; this has brought about a focus on the past and led to interest being raised in how events can emerge at specific historical points, how these events can then be interpreted as natural or inevitable (Darbyshire & Fleming, 2008), and how to “raise questions about the way in which we constitute ourselves and others in the game of education” (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 329). This helps us “step back” (Marshall, 2007, p. 20), produce “the history of the present” (Foucault, 1977, p. 31), arrive at an “analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework” (Foucault, 1980, p. 117) and view the influence of Confucian values and students’ learning in six different but overlapping ways:

- Confucianism as a historical event;
- Confucianism as a learning culture;
- Confucianism and Chinese higher education;
- Problematization of the present status of Confucian values and learning;
- Confucian cultural values and globalization;

- Development of learning conceptions and situating this study.

## **Confucianism as a historical event**

Existing literature, on which I developed my initial understandings of Confucianism, its views of learning and possible influences on students' learning, provides a solid foundation for this study. While acknowledging the vast body of research on Confucianism, with consideration of the scope and focus of this research, I situated Confucianism in a historical context and located "the acute manifestations of a particular 'meticulous ritual of power' or 'political technology of the body' to see where it arose, took shape, gained importance and so on" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 119; Kearins & Hooper, 2002, p. 739).

## **Confucius and Confucianism**

Confucius (551 BCE – 479 BCE) is an ancient Chinese thinker, social philosopher and educator. With personal name *Qiu* (丘) and courtesy name *Zhong Ni* (仲尼), he was born in *Zou Yi* (陬邑) (today's Nanxin county, *Qufu*, Shandong province, China) in *Lu* (鲁) (a state) in the Eastern *Zhou* Dynasty. His ancestors were aristocrats in *Song* (宋) (today's *Shangqiu*, Henan province). Confucius had a positive idea of how to participate in social activities; he travelled through all the kingdoms and lobbied princes in order to advocate his ruling ideology. Although some of the lords implemented his ideology, they never made it last for many reasons. Confucius was a failure in politics, so he then found another way to carry forward his theories and opinions. He established a private school, recruited students widely and advocated that "In instruction there is no grading into categories (有教无类)" (Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988, p. 69).

Confucius, proficient in ancient Chinese culture, was one of the most talented intellects of his contemporaries and was known as 'Sage indulged by God' (天纵之圣, 天之木铎) at that time. This name was derived from the *Analects*,

“The Empire has long been without the Way. Heaven is about to use your Master as the wooden tongue for a bell (天下之无道也久矣，天将以夫子为木铎)” (Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988, p. 13).

Within the *Analects*, Confucius was often referred to simply as ‘the Master’ (Zi 子). He was revered with honorific names by the rulers in later generations: In 1 A.D., Confucius was given his first posthumous name, the ‘Laudably Declarable Lord Ni’ (褒成宣尼公). In 1530, he was declared the ‘Extremely Sage Departed Teacher’ (至圣先师). He was also known separately as the ‘Great Sage’ (至圣), ‘First Teacher’ (先师), and ‘Model Teacher for Ten Thousand Ages’ (万世师表). In the Wade Giles System of Romanization, the honorific name was rendered as ‘Kung Fu-tzu’. The Latinized name ‘Confucius’ was derived from ‘Kung Fu-tzu’, and was first coined by 16<sup>th</sup> century Jesuit missionaries to China, most probably by Matteo Ricci (Rainey, 2010).

In modern China, he is most often known as *Kong Zi* (孔子), is also known by the honorific *Kong Fuzi* (孔夫子), literally ‘Master Kong’ and is named the first of the world's top ten cultural celebrities by UNESCO.

The *Analects of Confucius*, compiled and recorded by the disciples of Confucius and his disciples’ disciples, represents the thought of the Confucian School. It recorded the words and deeds of Confucius and his disciples. Confucius' thoughts were developed into a system of philosophy known as Confucianism (*Ru Jia* 儒家), which generated numerous subsequent schools of thought in Chinese history. To avoid difficulties in understanding, some Confucian ideas were mainly based on the *Analects* explained by *Yang Bojun* (杨伯峻), and translated by D. C. Lau (Confucius, 1979, 2008) in this study.

Confucius’ teaching and philosophy has deeply influenced the thought and life of Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese people (Tu, 1998). As a social philosopher, Confucius emphasizes personal and governmental morality, correctness of social relationships, justice and sincerity. Through his teaching

practice, he established a system of educational theory and summed up experiences and methods of teaching and learning.

First, Confucius promotes the Way (*Dao* 道), and encourages a *Junzi* (君子) to expand the Way (*Dao* 道). For Confucius, the Way (*Dao* 道) is the way that human beings should behave in society (Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988) and this tends to be an ethical or moral way (*Rendao* 仁道). Confucius pursues the Way (*Dao* 道) throughout his life, and even thinks that “He has not lived in vain who dies in the evening, having been told about the Way in the morning (朝闻道，夕死可矣)” (Liu Baonan 刘宝楠, 1988, p. 78). Second, he proposes a core concept ‘benevolence (*Ren* 仁)’, and suggests that “For *Junzi* of purpose and men of benevolence while it is inconceivable that they should seek to stay alive at the expense of benevolence, it may happen that they have to accept death in order to have benevolence accomplished (志士仁人，无求生以害仁，有杀身以成仁)” (Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988, p. 66; Ahn, 2008). Third, Confucius argues that people should deal with social affairs and should play a positive role in improving the moral level of the members of society. He advises that “A *Junzi* must be strong and resolute, for his burden is heavy and the road is long (士不可以不弘毅，任重而道远)” (Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988, p. 33), advocates that “when a student finds that he can more than cope with his studies, then he takes office (学而优则仕)” (Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988, p. 81). Fourth, Confucius advocates that “In instruction there is no grading into categories (有教无类)” (Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988, p. 69). He observes the characteristics of his disciples and teaches them according to their individual characteristics (因材施教) (Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988, p. 5-6).

## **Confucianism and other Chinese traditional thoughts**

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Period (春秋战国), all schools of thoughts contended for attention (百家争鸣). Besides Confucianism, there were a number of philosophical schools such as Legalism (*Fa Jia* 法家), Taoism (*Dao Jia* 道家) and Mohism (*Mo Jia* 墨家).

Taoism tends to think that *Dao* (道) is the way of Nature and the way things are (Little, 2006). *Lao Zi* (老子) believes that Confucians, by focusing on the human way, have exaggerated the importance of humans and failed to pay attention to Nature. He argues that chaos is caused by human beings who master too much knowledge, and suggests that humans should abandon knowledge and wisdom (绝圣弃智) (Wei Yuan 魏源, 1988), and let Nature take its course (无为而治) (Wang Bi 王弼, 1988, p. 35). *Zhuang Zi* (庄子) pays more attention to spiritually absolute freedom or *Xiaoyao* (逍遥) (Guo Qinfan 郭庆藩, p. 254), and suggests that “Seeing things from the perspective of *Dao* (道), they are equal (以道观之, 物无贵贱)” (Wang Xianqian 王先谦, 1988, p. 102).

Legalism disapproves Confucian educational concepts such as ‘benevolence (*Ren* 仁), righteousness (*Yi* 义), rite (*Li* 礼) and wisdom (*Zhi* 智)’. *Han Feizi* (韩非子) says that the private school of Confucius is unfaithful to lords and advises that the lords should ‘Prohibit their behaviours (禁其行)’, ‘Destroy their communities (破其群)’, ‘Break down their parties (散其党)’ (Wang Xianshen 王先慎, 1988, p. 316). He emphasizes the importance of farming and war, and advocates that “To enrich a country depends on farming while to fight against the enemy depends on soldiers (富国以农, 距敌恃卒)” (Wang Xianshen 王先慎, 1988, p. 345).

Mohism advocates an educational concept of ‘plain silk (素丝说)’ (Sun Yirang 孙诒让, 1988, p. 7). *Mo Zi* (墨子), compares the newborn baby with plain silk and believes that like dying silk, human nature is formed or changed or transformed by its environment and education. *Mo Zi* (墨子) also suggests that “Love is mutual and benefit is also mutual (兼相爱, 交相利)”, and advocates that “love all people in the world (爱利天下)” (Sun Yirang 孙诒让, 1988, p. 65).

In general, Taoism over-emphasizes Nature, Legalism over-stresses the Law, and Mohism suggests loving all people equally. Confucius emphasizes

benevolence, focuses on social missions, teaches people how to live actively and proposes that a *Junzi*'s politics should be based on the edict: "Love the family and then love the people (亲亲而仁民)" (Jiao Xun 焦循, 1988, p. 559). In this sense, the educational views of Confucius appear to represent a kind of golden mean (*Zhongyong* 中庸), and seem to be more suitable to the Chinese society (Kearins & Hooper, 2002). Therefore, Confucius' values gained prominence in China over other doctrines during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 AD). However, in the process of Chinese historical development, Confucianism has not experienced a process of evolution, but one of descent and emergence (Kearins & Hooper, 2002).

### **Confucianism in China: a process of descent and emergence**

Confucius' disciples and his only grandson, *Zi Si* (子思), continued his philosophical school after his death. Their efforts spread Confucian ideals to students who then became officials in many of the royal courts in China, thereby giving Confucianism the first wide-scale test of its dogma. While relying heavily on Confucius' ethical-political system, two of his most famous later followers emphasized radically different aspects of his teachings. Mencius (*Meng Zi* 孟子) (372 BCE - 289 BCE) articulates the innate goodness or kindness in human beings as a source of the ethical intuitions that guide people towards benevolence (*Ren* 仁), righteousness (*Yi* 义) and rite (*Li* 礼) (Jiao Xun 焦循, 1988). By contrast, *Xun Zi* (荀子) (313 BCE - 238 BCE) underscores the realistic and materialistic aspects of Confucian thoughts, and stresses that morality needs to be inculcated in society through tradition and in individuals through training because of the innate badness or evil in human beings (Wang Xianqian 王先谦, 1988a).

This realignment in Confucian thinking was parallel to the development of Legalism, which saw filial piety (*Xiao* 孝) as self-interest and not a useful tool to help a ruler to create an effective state. A disagreement between these two political philosophies came to a head in 221 BCE when the Qin (秦) state

conquered all of China. *Li Si* (李斯), the Prime Minister of the Qin Dynasty (秦朝) convinced the emperor of *Qin Shihuang* (秦始皇) to abandon Confucian values because he saw them as counter to the Legalist idea of centralizing the state around the ruler, as stated above. Then many Confucian scholars were killed and their books were burned - considered a huge blow to philosophy and Chinese scholarship.

Under the succeeding Han Dynasty and Tang Dynasty (618 AD – 907 AD), Confucian ideas gained even more widespread prominence. The works of Confucius were regarded as the official imperial philosophy and required reading for the civil service examination, a situation which continued nearly unbroken until the end of the 19th century.

From the time of the Opium Wars (鴉片战争), traditional Chinese society was increasingly subject to the crushing impact of the modern western civilization. Confucianism, as the normative discourse that had prevailed in Chinese society for more than two thousand years, had inevitably to face the western challenge head-on. For example, at that time, some western groups created educational institutions which would exemplify certain western academic models on Chinese soil. They included French Jesuit missionaries, American Protestants with the cooperation of British and Canadian colleagues, and German industrialists. These educational institutions became attractive to young Chinese intellectuals after the abolition of the imperial examination system in 1905 on one hand; on the other hand, the rising tide of Chinese nationalism meant that they came under increasing suspicion (Hayhoe, 1989).

I think that there were two points regarding the suspicion. The first point is that to what extent foreign-derived academic models reinforced Confucian patterns of knowledge regimentation for political control. Based on Hayhoe's critique (1989), a distinction can be made between French patterns which harmonized well with the authoritarian Confucian tradition and American educators who were often perplexed to know how to deal with the radical political activism that resulted. Generally, the European knowledge

tradition was more amenable to the support of political regimentation and control while American patterns encouraged a more open and flexible approach to modern knowledge, conducive to both scientific creativity and social activism. The second point is that the higher education models introduced by foreigners were largely peripheral to the mainstream education reforms being engineered by a modernizing Chinese leadership. They did not look to foreigners' efforts for inspiration in their reforms, but visited or sent delegations to the nations whose educational institutions were of interest and modeled their reforms directly on foreign experience (Hayhoe, 1989).

From the end of the nineteenth century onward, in particular, during the May Fourth Movement (五四运动) (1919) and the Great Cultural Revolution (文化大革命) (1966 - 1976), Confucianism was frequently attacked. For example, in 1919, *Chen Duxiu* (陈独秀), a leader of the May Fourth Movement (五四运动), declared that "In order to advocate democracy, we are obliged to oppose Confucianism". In their conviction that "Confucianism and monarchy were indissolubly bound", radicals of the May Fourth Movement did not distinguish between Confucianism as the philosophical tradition based on Confucius' teachings and Confucianism as state orthodoxy.

However, *Chen Duxiu* (陈独秀) admitted in the 1930s that the May Fourth slogan, "Down with the Confucian Shop", while serving an important purpose in their political struggles, was less than fair to thinkers such as Confucius and Mencius (Tan, 2003). *Hu Shi* (胡适) recognized that Confucians might have taken the monarchical political structure for granted, but monarchy is not a necessary part of Confucianism (Yu, 1992).

Some Chinese scholars, therefore, declared that Confucianism had become a 'wandering ghost' (Tan, 2003). However, there are also many Confucians who try to find a new body for the 'ghost' of Confucianism. For example, in contemporary China, the government has attached a great deal of importance

to Confucius as a symbol of modern China. After becoming president in 2003, *Hu Jintao* (胡锦涛) pursued the idea of 'harmonious society' in China. President *Hu* went out of his way to identify modern China with Confucius and Confucian values. Another example was the rapid growth of Confucius Institutions all over the world. The Chinese government was embracing Confucius and his role in global education through the Confucius Institutions, including one established at the University of Auckland and another at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. Considering current advocacy of Confucian values in China (e.g., harmony, morality), this investigation was timely and needed.

### **Confucianism in the era of *Mao Zedong*: subjugated knowledge**

Maoist socialism became the accepted belief system after the establishment of new China. Criticized and isolated by western capitalist countries, *Mao Zedong* (毛泽东) began to imitate the Soviet model of education and to borrow its educational theories and practices. Political campaigns were carried out to eliminate western influences from education. Nevertheless, after the Sino-Soviet split, all Soviet educational theories were condemned. Then *Mao Zedong* (毛泽东) launched the Great Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976), which brought disaster to China's education and culture. This 10-year period "not only eradicated residual western style education and the earlier emulated Soviet Union education model, but also wiped out any trace of Confucian education" (Yang & Frick, 2009, p. 31). The normal functions of schools were destroyed. Old thoughts, old culture, old customs and old habits were attacked and, later on, Confucianism in particular (Deng, 2012), as the Confucian scholarly tradition was considered to persist in China's modern universities, and was seen as antithetical to socialist modernity.

In an attempt to explain the Great Cultural Revolution, I think that it may be worthwhile looking at two themes central to their criticism of the

universities they had known (Hayhoe, 1989). One was the need to uproot old thinking, old values and old culture, in particular remnants of the Confucian scholarly tradition which had persisted in China's modern universities and which were seen as antithetical to socialist modernity. The second theme was the need to shatter the shackles of all foreign creeds and to establish a socialist education system. This campaign criticized the 'all-out Sovietization' of the 1950s as being just as misguided as the bourgeois Western academicism of the Nationalist period.

As Hayhoe (1989) argues, what is particularly fascinating about this Chinese determination to slough off all foreign and traditional influences and create an entirely new kind of university is the fact that it offers a powerful illustration of a particular understanding of 'Third World problems' and 'modernization'. For China, the Soviet model of the university was as much a 'Western model' as had been the American and European patterns introduced at earlier periods. Perhaps because its introduction was more fully coordinated with direct political and economic influences it came to be seen as even more repressive, contributing to an outbreak of activism on Chinese campuses of unprecedented violence and extremism. On the other hand, under the influence of the Confucian knowledge tradition, the thought of rebellion was barely thinkable. Perhaps the intensity of the Great Cultural Revolution call to rebel against familial and patriarchal authority needs to be understood against this background.

So as previously established and erudite knowledge, Confucian tradition had been criticized and even written out. As a local and popular heritage, Confucianism had been marginalized. The suffering of Confucianism in China appears to be in line with Foucault's idea of 'subjugated knowledge' (Foucault, 1977), which is lowly ranked and considered inadequate for the accepted standards of knowledge and science. The 'subjugated knowledge', as Besley (2005) points out, has two forms: one constitutes previously established, erudite knowledge that has been buried, hidden, disguised, masked, removed,

or written out by revisionist histories; another involves local, popular, or indigenous knowledge that is marginalized or denied space to perform (p. 368). It is these two forms of subjugated knowledge that “challenge the dominant stories in people’s lives” (Besley, 2005, p.368) as this perspective provides us with creative, controversial and original thinking on philosophical-historical-social ideas, and opens up possibilities for us to sort out how we might see, understand, and in turn, negotiate our subjectivity and the power relations in our world.

Thus, to examine Confucian values and to explore their influence on students, one needs to rediscover the history of struggle and conflict, and to challenge the power-knowledge institutions and scientific discourses (Foucault, 1980). Doing so would form a critical ontology of Chinese identity and Chinese history.

## **Confucianism as a learning culture**

The learning style adopted by Chinese learners is often attributed to “Confucian values”. Confucius left few if any writings, but his students recorded many of his ideas in the *Analects* (Confucius, 479 B.C.E., 1979, 2008; hereinafter cited by book and chapter only). The *Analects* provides insight into an approach to teaching and learning.

### **Benevolence (*Ren* 仁) and ‘self-mastery’**

To understand Confucius’ teaching and learning, we also need to examine the relationship of three key ethical ideas of benevolence (*Ren* 仁), righteousness (*Yi* 义) and rite (*Li* 礼). Righteousness has to do with the personal investment of meaning in action, based on the interaction between a person’s individuality and her environment in specific situations (Liang Qichao 梁启超, 1996). From a personal perspective, benevolence is the extension and improvement of one’s relational network (Hou Wailu, Zhao Jibin & Du Guoxiang 侯外庐, 赵纪彬, 杜国庠, 1957). As a process extending and

improving interpersonal interactions, benevolence builds and sustains community. Benevolence is achieved through rite and rite brings into play righteousness with every observance (Ren Jiyu 任继愈, 1983). According to Feng Youlan 冯友兰 (1983), righteousness is as indispensable as rite in achieving benevolence, and is “the human path” (*Dao* 道) that realizes benevolence. Benevolence brings together person making and community making through mutual enhancement between rite and righteousness (Tan, 2003). For example, in the *Analects*,

Yan Yuan asked about benevolence. The Master said, “To return to the observance of the rites through overcoming the self constitutes benevolence (克己复礼为仁). If for a single day a man could return to the observance of the rites through overcoming himself, then the whole Empire would consider benevolence to be his. However, the practice of benevolence depends on oneself alone, and not on others”.

Yan Yuan said, “I should like you to list the items.”

The Master said, “do not look unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not listen unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not speak unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not move unless it is in accordance with the rites.” (Book 12:1)

There are two points in the definition of benevolence which deserve attention. First, benevolence consists in overcoming the self. This is a central idea in Confucius’ learning and teaching that being benevolent has nothing to do with self-interest (D. C. Lau, 1992, p. xix). In Confucius’ view, he would not remain in undeserved wealth and position in spite of their being desirable objects (Book 4:5). He argues that at the sight of profit one should think of what is right (Book 14:12). Confucius advises us that “if a man were to set his heart on benevolence, he would be free from evil” (Book 4:4). Second, to be benevolent one has to return to the observance of the rites. As D. C. Lau argues, the rites “were a body of rules governing action in every aspect of life and they were the repository of past insights

into morality” (D. C. Lau, 1992, p. xx). Confucius suggests that one should not listen, speak or move unless it was in accordance with the rites (Book 12:1). He says that if a man could return to the observance of the rites through overcoming himself, the whole Empire would consider benevolence to be his (Book 12:1). For Confucius, overcoming the self or self-control (*Keji* 克己) is not self-denial and is not to renounce one’s own interests in favour of the interests of others (Song, 2012). It is a secular model consonant with the demands of a postmodern world that recognizes the inescapability of desire and the necessity of pleasure in a new body politics (Besley, 2005). As Tan (2003) says, a Confucian conception of self is not a ready-made self, but always in the making and being cultivated (p. 31).

For Foucault, self-mastery as a style of morality becomes a fundamental ethical form of behaviour (Besley, 2013). As Foucault points out, rather than renunciation, self-mastery is “the progressive consideration of self, or mastery over oneself, obtained not through the renunciation of reality but through the acquisition and assimilation of truth” (Foucault, 1988, p. 35). He says,

It was a matter of knowing how to govern one’s own life in order to give it the most beautiful form possible (in the eyes of others, of oneself, and of the future generations for whom one could serve as an example). That’s what I tried to reconstitute: the formation and development of a practice of self whose objective was to constitute oneself as the worker of the beauty of one’s own life. (Foucault, 1989c, p. 298)

What we need note, here, is Foucault’s slant on the relation between technology and personhood through the construction of new ways of exercising power over selves, and thus, through this exercise, the making of new selves, and the conditions for these new selves to reproduce themselves (Lock, Epston, Maisel & Faria, 2005). Then Foucault outlines how the structural characteristics of such an operation of power over people’s actions

recruits people into complicity in the subjugation of their lives and their bodies (Lock, Epston, Maisel & Faria, 2005, p. 318). This, Foucault argues, acts to increase the time-span over which a person needs to exercise a psychologically-enforced self-constraint upon their own actions (Lock, Epston, Maisel & Faria, 2005). There arises what he terms 'technologies of the self', which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being (Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

So Foucault draws our attention to the ways in which "technologies have always been part of culture and society and instrumental in questions of self-formation" (Besley, 2014, p. 12). Foucault's historical investigations of the formation of self focus on those concerning truth, obligation, and relations to ourselves and to others. He thinks that care of the self (concern for the self) was main form of ethics in Roman and Greek thought for over a thousand years and that the concept of 'culture' of self is central (Besley, 2014). The term 'the culture of the self' indicates that we need to approach the question of the self by "locating it within the network of values and social practices that characterize a culture at a particular time" (Besley, 2014, p. 11). To have access to these values one must be able to devote his or her life to them.

In this sense, 'technologies of the self' "invokes a kind of agency which is missing from the accounts of ideology or governmentality" (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 325). Thus, for Foucault, the schema for 'technologies of the self' is a process of both conscientisation and *parrhesia* that "throws light on the ways we are each complicit in the ordering of the world that exacerbates the all-encompassment of the technological *Gestell*", and "involves the honest appraisal of governmental techniques and an understanding (as far as we are able) to make these techniques visible to ourselves" (ibid, p. 326). As Besley (2013) says, these technologies are harnessed to make the individual a significant element for the state through the exercise of a form of power, which Foucault calls 'governmentality', in becoming useful, docile, practical

citizens. So this kind of self-mastery incorporates notions of discipline, governmentality, corporality, politics, power, freedom, ethics and the historical-social context to understandings of the self.

This approach seems to be partial meaning of Confucius' benevolence, which helps people/students ethically constitute themselves: by ethical work that a person performs on their self with the aim of becoming an ethical subject, the way in which individuals relate to moral obligations and rules and the type of person one aims to become in behaving ethically (Besley, 2005). That is, there is no essence, only 'becoming' (Besley & Edwards, 2005, p. 278), only a phenomenology or hermeneutics of the self – the forging of an identity through processes of self-formation in Confucius' benevolence.

Among Chinese ancient schools of thought, Confucian philosophy is considered to be a way of life, a quest for wisdom, a way of being and ultimately a way of transforming the self (Tan, 2003; D. C. Lau, 2008). Here spiritual exercises are a form of pedagogy designed to teach students the philosophical life that has both a moral and an existential value (Peters, 2005). These exercises are aimed at self-mastery, nothing less than a transformation of one's world-view and personality by involving all aspects of one's being, including intellect, imagination, sensibility and will. In the process, the person will become a responsible citizen. Thus, incorporating Confucian tradition into the formulation of self-mastery, and integrating Confucian philosophy with 21st century science to create a practical program tends to emphasize the whole body, mind, emotion and spirit.

This self-mastery or self-control requires one to seize the controls, to be one's own boss or director, and consciously to choose for oneself the thoughts and actions which will make one who and what one wants to be. As Confucius says, "the practice of benevolence depends on oneself alone, and not on others" (Book 12:1).

Also in the *Analects*, Confucius says, “Do not impose on others what yourself do not desire” (Book 12: 2). Then the master makes further explanations:

A benevolent man may help others to take their stand in that he himself wishes to take his stand, and gets others there in that he himself wishes to get there. The ability to take as analogy what is near at hand can be called the method of benevolence. (Book 6:30).

From this, we can see that Confucius defines benevolence in terms of loving one’s fellow men (Lau, 1992). If one does so, then the whole Empire would consider benevolence to be his (Book 12:1). Thus, the Confucius’ proverb of ‘overcoming the self or self-control (*Keji* 克己) and ‘to return to the observance of the rites’ (*Fuli* 复礼) constitutes ‘benevolence (*Ren* 仁)’ is a kind of personal cultivation. It is the first step in bringing about an ideal world order, and is a mutual modification of person and environment (Tan, 2003). It is not “a question of agency versus structure, but the way they integrate and mutually inform one another” (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 320).

Cultivating a person is centrally involved in the politics of subjectivity, in forming, shaping, and constituting the self (Besley, 2014) because self exists in the context of the knowledge of its own society, and always reflects the bounds and conventions of its own history (Devine & Irwin, 2005). In general, in Confucian terms, overcoming self might be indulged; but in Foucault’s views, care of the self might be fundamental. However, both of Confucius’ benevolence and Foucault’s technologies of self appear to be interested in the self and to pay attention with management of the self, though how and what is desirable is different between them.

## ***Junzi* (君子) and ‘human agency’**

Confucius describes a concept of *Junzi* (君子). Some scholars translated *Junzi* into ‘gentleman’ (Lau, 1992, 2008). Ames and Rosemont (1998) in their translation of the *Analects* use the phrase ‘exemplary persons’. Roger Ames and David Hall (1987) are known for their concern with translation as an obstacle to the understanding and appreciation of Chinese philosophy. In *Thinking through Confucius* (1987), they claim that

the major difficulty confronted by the reader in attempting to use and appreciate translations and discussions of the original sources lies not so much in the syntax as in the semantic content of core philosophical concepts. . . . This general problem of translation is exacerbated when philosophy is not translated and interpreted by trained philosophers. (Pp. 41 - 42)

Ames and Rosemont (1998) employ their philosophical acumen, seeking to provide “at least a partial answer to what makes Chinese culture Chinese . . . [and to offer] insight into the question of what makes human beings human” (p. xv). In the *Analects*, *Junzi* (君子) is a person who “has morality as his basic stuff and by observing the rites puts it into practice (君子义以为质，礼以行之)” (Book 15:18). Lau (1997) argues that *Junzi* “is the ideal moral character” (P. xiv). Ames and Rosemont (1998) say that *Junzi* “is resolutely proper in the conduct of his roles – conduct which is not forced, but rather effortless, spontaneous, creative” (p. 84). Based on these explanations, exemplary persons might be a better alternative, as this translation not only removes the sexist bias, but also show the way to others and stresses the role-modeling aspect of the construct. So in my thesis, I get rid of ‘gentleman’ and refer simply to *Junzi* on each occasion.

In the *Analects*, *Junzi* takes stock of the situation they confront, as well as their own desires and concerns, before determining their course of action (Archer, 2000). The Master said, “The *Junzi* agrees with others without being an echo. The small man echoes without being in agreement (君子和而不同，

小人同而不和)” (Book 13:23). For Confucius, *Junzi* continually assess whether the concerns they were once devoted to are worthy of ongoing devotion, how they make their way through the world, and how they make a place in the world - a place where they hope they can exercise some governance in their own lives and become the person they wish to become, within the social world available to them (Archer, 2000). In other words, a *Junzi* has not simply accepted, but has in some sense internalised, adopted, become conscious, and “prevents the subject becoming a ‘slave’ to their own passions” (Marshall, 1996, p. 83). Correspondingly, a *Junzi* is not a heteronomic person who “follows laws defined by others”, but one who decides to “integrate, hierarchize or reflect upon the rules imposed from outside the self” (Devine & Irwin, 2005, pp. 321-322), as Confucius says, “the practice of benevolence depends on oneself alone, and not on others (为仁由己， 而由人乎哉)” (Book 12:1).

The notion of Confucius’ *Junzi* (君子) seems to be similar to the concept of human agency because, as an active agent, a *Junzi* has his or her own distinctive properties and powers to reflect on the structural or cultural influence; he or she acquires a sense of self, a personal identity and social identity in the course of reflection (Archer, 2000). The human capacity for reflexivity, argues Archer, mediates between structure and agency, which is embodied in internal conversation:

The ‘inner conversation’ is how our personal emergent powers are exercised on and in the world – natural, practical and social – which is our triune environment. This ‘interior dialogue’ is not just a window upon the world, rather it is what determines our being-in-the-world, though not in the times and circumstances of our choosing. (Archer, 2000, p. 318)

Self-reflection, claims Confucius, is to ask the self if he or she has mastered what has been learned through a comprehensive understanding. In the *Analects*, Confucius encourages his disciples to examine themselves on what

has been done every day (日三省吾身), and reflect on what has been passed on from others or authorities. For example,

Every day I examine myself on three counts (吾日三省吾身). In what I have undertaken on another's behalf, have I failed to do my best? In my dealings with my friends have I failed to be trustworthy in what I say? Have I failed to practise repeatedly what has been passed on to me (为人谋而不忠乎? 与朋友交而不信乎? 传不习乎?)? (Book 1:4)

For Confucius' *Junzi* and Archer's human agency, the agent is active and reflexive, has the properties and powers to "monitor their own lives, to mediate structural and cultural properties of society, and thus to contribute to societal reproduction or transformation" (Archer, 2003b, p. 25). Reflexivity is a process in which individuals react to situations where they involuntarily find themselves. Archer (2003a) says that the process through which the effects of structural properties are mediated by the individual agency entails three main stages:

(I) Structural and cultural properties *objectively* shape the situations which agents confront involuntarily, and possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to

(II) Agents' own configuration of concerns, as *subjectively* defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality – nature, practice and society.

(III) Courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of agents who *subjectively* determine their practical projects in relation to their *objective* circumstances. (Archer, 2003a, p. 135)

The concepts of structure and agency have started to emerge in higher education research, and to perform a major service for educational theory (Clegg, 2005), though not as much as in social theory (Ashwin, 2008). There is a body of literature about teaching and research in which human agency and structure are discussed (Devine & Irwin, 2005; Fanghanel, 2007; Fanghanel & Trowler, 2007; Plumb, 2008; Kahn, 2009; Leibowitz, Schalkwyk, Ruiters, Farmer & Adendorff, 2012; Brew, Boud, Lucus & Crawford, 2013; Clegg & Stevenson, 2013). For example, Devine and Irwin (2005) state that for

educationalists, agency is not individuated freedom of will, but “the hesitant bringing forth of reflective thinking and practices on the contexts, the parameters, and the effects of modes of behaviour (individual and communal)” (p. 329); as such, thinking or practising reflection “can gradually initiate raised consciousness of particular events, issues, structures, paradigms” (ibid) in the educational area.

However, in relevant literature human agency is not paid much attention with specific reference to both personal accounts and cultural practices in relation to learning. That is, the interplay between the individual student’s agency and structural power has rarely been considered in the learning area. As Kahn, Qualter and Young (2012) argue, “theories of learning typically downplay the interplay between social structure and student agency” (p. 859).

In recent years, the emergence and presence of structure and agency in the area of students’ learning have drawn attention in some literature. For example, Kahn, Qualter and Young (2012) explore how social and cultural structures and personal emergent powers combine to ensure variation in the emergence of such reflective capacity, suggest that the influence of these factors on professional learning is mediated through reflexive deliberation and social interaction, with the exercise of one’s personal powers specifically identified as a stratum of social reality, and offer “a comprehensive account of professional learning, showing how a focus on structure and agency increases the explanatory power of learning theory” (p. 859). Mathieson (2012) explores how departmental TLA (teaching, learning and assessment) cultures mediate between individual agency and a range of structural factors. Pym and Kapp (2013) argue that many of the students have shown considerable agency in gaining admission to university despite their social backgrounds, have developed a culture of learning and have promoted social connectedness, identity and agency” (p. 272). Hopwood (2010) focuses on agency, frames others as mediating students’ experiences and suggests that questions of agency in doctoral study are in need of further attention.

In parallel with these studies, my current research shares research interest with the scholars, turns to an emphasis on the significance of human agency in framing my research, with specific reference to both personal accounts and cultural practices in relation to Chinese students' learning and explores how Confucian ideas of learning shape/inform/influence students' classroom behaviours and practices, as well as how students weigh up or deliberate on the influence of Confucian ideas of learning, coupled with other competing ideologies.

### **Confucius' learning ideas**

In the *Analects*, Confucius serves as a teacher and values effortful learning, behavioural reform, pragmatic learning, acquisition of essential knowledge and respectful learning (Tweed & Lehman, 2002).

Confucius believes that learning is closely tied to hard work. He speaks of effort much more than of ability, and respects the sort of man "who forgets to eat when he works himself into a frenzy over some problem (发愤忘食)" (Book 7:19). He expects nothing less than a student's effort (Book 7:20, 7:14) and willingly teaches anyone who wants to learn, regardless of their ability; he says that "I have never denied instruction to anyone who, of his own accord, has given me so much as a bundle of dried meat as a present (自行束脩以上，吾未尝无诲焉)" (Book 7:7). He looks down on those who pursue quick results (欲速成) and who want to avoid extended effort (Book 14:44). He believes that practice and single-minded effort (言忠信，行笃敬) are instrumental to attaining success (Book 15:6, 15:32).

Confucius also emphasizes behavioural reform. For Confucius, a primary goal of learning is behavioural reform by means of a deep internal transformation of the student. For example,

The Master said, "Use your ears widely but leave out what is doubtful; repeat the rest with caution and you will make few mistakes. Use your eyes widely and

leave out what is hazardous; put the rest into practice with caution and you will have few regrets (言寡尤，行寡悔，禄在其中矣). (Book 2:18)

Confucius and his followers think that behavioural reform is a central goal of education because virtuous behaviours including the notions of 'virtue' and 'Junzi' can ensure individual success and societal harmony. Some western learning theories such as those of Socrates also discuss virtue, but his conception seems at times to be less pragmatic and more focuses on apprehension of truth than on direct behavioural reform (Tweed & Lehman, 2002).

Overall, Confucius has a pragmatic orientation to learning (Lee, 1996). An acceptable goal of learning, in addition to personal reform, is to competently conduct oneself within a civil service job (Book 13:5), a role Confucius viewed as important for reforming society. The pragmatic orientation appears frequently in the *Analects*. For example, Confucius believes that there are activities that go deeper into learning than merely storing up knowledge. He says,

It is these things that cause me concern: failure to cultivate virtue, failure to go more deeply into what I have learned, inability, when I am told what is right, to go over to where it is, and inability to reform myself when I have defects (德之不修，学之不讲，闻义不能徙，不善不能改，是吾忧也) (Book 7:3).

This text suggests that these activities relate not to higher thinking skills, as many educators (Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988; Liu Baonan 刘宝楠, 1988) might assume, but to self-improvement, including becoming more virtuous and more skilled. Confucius also tells his students that if they correct themselves and avoid error, they will be able to procure a civil service career, "If a man manages to make himself correct, what is there to taking office for him? (苟正其身矣，于从政乎何有?)" (Book 13:13). If you study, "you will end up with the salary of an official (学也，禄在其中矣)" (Book 15:32). Confucius sums up his practical orientation:

If a man who knows the three hundred pieces in the *Odes* by heart fails when given administrative responsibilities and proves incapable of exercising his own initiative when sent to foreign states, then what use are these to him, however many they may be? (诵诗三百，授之以政，不达；使于四方，不能专对；虽多，亦奚以为?) (Book 13:5)

Acquisition of essentials is central to Confucius' conception of learning. Confucius urges his students to learn the essentials and assures them that if they learn the essentials from the previous generations, they will know what future generations will know (其或继周者，虽百世，可知也) (Book 2:23). Confucius also claims not to be creating ideas, and says that "I transmit but do not innovate; I am truthful in what I say and devoted to antiquity (述而不作，信而好古)" (Book 7:1). *Li Zehou* 李泽厚 (1996) argues that Confucius' main mission is to restore the ritual practices instituted by the Duke of Zhou (周朝), and thereby to restore clan-based social organization and government (p. 7). Despite Confucius' characterization of himself as a transmitter rather than a creator (*Shu Er Bu Zuo* 述而不作), some scholars suggest that Confucius is not as conservative as others such as *Li Zehou* portray him (Tan, 2003). Confucius' apparent denial of his own creativity may attest more to his modesty than to a lack of creativity. The sage is closely associated with creativity (*Zuo* 作) in the Confucian tradition. According to the *Book of Rites*, "one who creates is called sage; one who transmits is called perspicacious. A perspicacious sage means one who transmits and creates" (Tan, 2003, p. 82). Given that Confucius repeatedly denied being a sage, it is not surprising that he should also consider himself falling short of creativity.

Thus, even this great scholar views his role as one of acquiring and transferring knowledge rather than expressing personal hypotheses. Excessive focus on generating ideas goes against the Confucian idea of the modest, slow-to-speak individual focused on learning from respected others; this is evident in quotes such as "He is quick in action but cautious in speech (敏于事而慎于言)" (Book 1:14), and "sensitive to other people's words and observant of the expression on their faces (察言而观色)" (Book 12: 20).

However, in Confucius' views, students are not merely to parrot the words of authorities, but truly to understand and to be reformed by knowledge contained in those words. For example, Confucius says that "The gentlemen agree with others without being an echo (君子和而不同)" (Book 13:23), and suggests that learners should use their ears widely and follow what is good in what they have heard; they should use their eyes widely and retain what they have seen in their mind (多闻，择其善者而从之；多见而识之) (Book 7:28). Confucius also asserts that he desires his students to sift his teaching and to criticise his statements, and says that "I discover that it does, in fact, throw light on what I said (退而省其私，亦足以发)" (Book 2:9). For example,

The Master said, "A man is worthy of being a teacher who gets to know what is new by keeping fresh in his mind what he is already familiar with (子曰：温故而知新，可以为师矣)". (Book 2:11)

But more frequently, Confucius seems to value an acquisition-focused approach to learning. The priority he gives to acquisition of essentials expresses itself in his comparison of the value of thinking and learning. He says,

Once I went without food all day and without sleep all night thinking, but I found that this did me no good at all. It would have been better for me to have spent the time in learning (吾尝终日不食，终夜不寝，以思，无益，不如学也). (Book 15: 31)

So, for Confucius, innovation is acceptable in certain contexts, but the tendency to innovate or to criticise without extensive preparatory knowledge is a fault.

Respectful learning is another aspect of Confucius' ideas of learning. Confucius expects learners to respect and to obey authority figures, and says that "The ruler should employ the services of his subjects in accordance with the rites. A subject should serve his ruler by doing his utmost (君使臣以礼，臣事君以忠)" (Book 3:19; 4:18-21; 14:43-44). Confucius advises that to

honour those higher than ourselves is the highest expression of the sense of justice, and believes that virtue is achieved primarily by observing and learning from people who provide models of virtue. This is called “the Pole North Star principle” (Woods & Lamond, 2011). So students are encouraged to find someone better than themselves, to imitate that person, and to become his equal (见贤思齐焉) (Book 4:17). Confucius’ own respectfulness is frequently expressed in his emphasis on learning from the past. He often cites concrete historical cases from which his students could learn. He praises the virtues of the Zhou Dynasty (周朝), and in a sense, the records of the Zhou (周) time period provides the textbooks on which he relies. For example,

The Master said, “The Zhou is resplendent in culture, having before it the example of the two previous dynasties. I am for the Zhou (子曰：周监于二代，郁郁乎文哉！吾从周)” (Book 3:14)

For Confucius, learning is not focused mainly on questioning, evaluating, and generating knowledge because truth is not found primarily in the self (Tweed & Lehman, 2002). Instead, truth and the associated good character traits are learned mainly from the collective, in particular, learned from individuals whom the collective recognizes as exemplars and from the ancients whom the collective recognizes as even greater exemplars (见贤思齐；述而不作，信而好古) (Book 4:17; 7:1). The epistemology underlying this approach presumes that most of the important truths are already known and available to those who submit to a worthy master; thus, one needs to engage in the task of attending to recognized masters to progress. For example,

The Master said, “I have seen him presume to take a seat and to walk abreast his seniors. He does not want to make progress. He is after quick results (吾见其居于位也，见其与先生并行也。非求益者也，欲速成者也)” (Book 14:44).

Confucius to some extent expects his students to sift his teachings and find things out for themselves, but he does not encourage an educative task focused mainly on searching individualistically for truth (Tweed & Lehman, 2002). Therefore, students’ apparent reluctance to express opinions in class is

said to be determined by their Confucian culture (Kennedy, 2002). Murphy (1987) suggests that the reason Hong Kong students display an almost unquestioning acceptance of the knowledge of the teacher may be a transfer of the Confucian ethic of filial piety, coupled with an emphasis on strictness of discipline and proper behaviour.

As the cornerstone of Chinese traditional culture, Confucianism has influenced Chinese educational thought and practice of teaching and learning for thousands of years (Deng, 2011). At that time, talented people were selected for positions in civil service based on their examination results in the tests of Confucian classics.

With the export of the Confucian texts to Japan and Korea, students and scholars from other Asian nations also paid their dues to Confucian centres of learning at various periods (Hayhoe, 1989). The prevailing pedagogy in modern Chinese classrooms reflects a mixture embodying both Western and Chinese (Confucian) characteristics (Cheng 2011; Waktins & Biggs, 1996, 2001). In the 21st century, China continues to 'import' varieties of educational theories from the West. However, the legitimacy and suitability of Western theory are questioned by Chinese educators on the grounds that China has its own distinct culture and tradition, with unique issues and problems (Deng, 2011).

For Chinese students, they constitute a major group of the world's learners, but there is very little data-based research into their culture of learning (Kennedy, 2002). While some studies focus on the influence of Confucian values on students' learning (Shi, 2006; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Pratt, 1992), few of them do so in relation to the influence of Confucian ideas of learning on Chinese university students. It also becomes evident that little attention has been given to the possible influence of Confucian ideas of learning on university students' classroom behaviours and practices. Moreover, while some researchers have addressed one or a set of Confucian-related ideas of learning, this is insufficient in itself to realise the whole picture. This research,

therefore, adopts a comprehensive approach, as well as takes into account the influence of a changing society, aims to focus on university students' construction of meaning with regard to Confucian-related ideas and their understandings, behaviours and practices of learning.

## **Confucianism and Chinese higher education**

### **Higher education in China**

By the close of the 18th century, China had developed a unique civilization over two thousand years of its imperial history. During such a long process, the imperial examination system (科举考试) was the key element of ancient Chinese higher learning (Hayhoe, 1996). The imperial examination system dominated traditional higher education, creating a Confucian scholar-official class of intellectuals who climbed the ladder from local to provincial and finally capital and palace examinations (Hayhoe, 1989). During this period, higher education in China had evolved according to its own logic despite external influences, and had trained traditional Confucian scholars with little knowledge of the outside world. Although the 19th century saw the diffusion of the western higher education models, China's communication with the west was intentionally hindered. That is, the imperial examination system regulated the interpretation and application of the classical Confucian texts, the basis of all true knowledge, and controlled the precedent-setting historical record. In contrast to the autonomy and academic freedom won by European university scholars over time, this Chinese community of intellectuals enjoyed a scholarly monopoly over the imperial bureaucracy and an intellectual authority that was never effectively challenged (Hayhoe, 1989).

Then extra-territoriality was imposed upon China by some western countries, resulting from the First Opium War. Western Catholics tended to focus on developing parochial education to teach new converts basic religious and liturgical knowledge. They were easily absorbed within Chinese traditional institutions, and admired the state which was ruled by the imperial

university and its scholars, according to secular Confucian canons of reason and justice (Hayhoe, 1989). However when Protestant missionaries began to take an earnest interest in the conversion of China, much had changed.

I think that there are two reasons about this change. One is that some Chinese scholars and officials realized the need to reform the education system through borrowing advanced ideas from the West and adapting Confucianism to Western modernity. The adopted strategy was to select certain Western ideas and models and preserve essential Confucian ideas and values (Deng, 2011). Another is that this sparked debates between reformists and traditionalists over the questions of 'Western utilitarianism' versus 'Confucian ethics', and 'Christianity' versus 'Confucianism'. As Hayhoe (1989) says, internal decline under the Qing dynasty "was compounded by incontrovertible evidence of external empires which could not be subjugated by the authority of Confucian canons of knowledge" (p. 56).

Reforms of traditional higher learning institutions started after the establishment of China's first modern university in 1895 (Yang, 2004). During the period of Yuan Shikai and the warlord, Chinese modernizers create new institutions for western techniques, such as military and naval academies, and foreign language institutions, to train young people capable of dealing with western aggression. They established mathematics as an examination subject, introduced certain 'modern' subject areas into traditional Confucian institutions.

These modernizers believed that western techniques could be absorbed into a revitalized Confucian empire enabling it to deal effectively with foreign incursions, and to contribute to China's self-strengthening (Hayhoe, 1989). However, as Yuan Shikai reinstated the imperial system, these institutions were still strictly subordinate to the traditional Confucian institutions of the imperial examination system, which continued to focus on the classical Confucian knowledge tradition (Shu, 1979).

With the Revolution of 1911 Sun Yat Sen established the provisional government and a modern education system was established in tune with prevailing world trends. For China, the whole framework of modern disciplines was introduced from abroad, after the abolition of the traditional imperial examination (科举考试) in 1905, and the establishment of modern universities on a western model (Hayhoe & Zha, 2004). Cai Yuanpei was appointed as Minister of Education and introduced a European model derived largely from his experience of the German universities. Modern arts and sciences, rather than Confucian classics, were to be the core curricular areas of the new republican university, with professional fields such as engineering and law to be developed in separate higher institutions (Shu, 1979).

I think that the aims of education formulated by Sun Yat Sen and Cai Yuanpei had been five-fold: utilitarian, moral, military and aesthetic education, also education for a world view. The first three were regarded as essential for republican political and economic development. The latter two were to foster a modern Chinese spirit that would replace Confucianism (Zhou, 1934). The integration of arts and sciences through the core discipline of philosophy created an atmosphere of extraordinary intellectual vitality, in which Confucianism was finally fully repudiated (Shu, 1979).

With the accession of the Nationalist Party to power in 1927 China (Republican periods) finally had a clearly focused modern ideology in Sun Yat Sen's 'Three Principles of the People: nationalism, people's livelihood and people's rights' (Hayhoe, 1989). Reform movements were carried out to promote democratization of education across China. Chinese intellectuals called for the creation of a new Chinese culture based on Western standards, especially democracy and science. The classical Chinese language (文言文 *wenyanwen*) was replaced by written vernacular language (白话 *Baihua*). Western theories were adapted to China's socio-cultural situations (Deng, 2011). On the other hand, Confucianism was condemned and underwent a

process of modernization in response to the challenges of modernity. The philosophy of past Confucian thinkers were interpreted or reinterpreted and transformed in the light of Western and non-Confucian ideas (Tan, 2003). Nevertheless during the Sino-Japanese war, scholars made attempts to restore Confucianism as a means to counter the influence of Western liberal and democratic theory and to educate loyal and obedient citizens (Deng 2011).

In general, I think that the Chinese university of the Republican era (1912-1949) developed into a relatively mature institution, which wished to achieve a balance between its Chinese identity and its ability to link up to a world community of universities. Therefore, it was greatly to the credit of the Nationalist government to have created vital modern scholarly institutions, which were shaped by China's own eclectically chosen foreign patterns and had little to do with either German or American political, economic and military involvement in China during the thirties and forties. This eclectic way mainly stemmed from the Confucian tradition (Hayhoe & Zha, 2004).

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) founded the People's Republic of China in 1949. Between 1949 and 1952 the Chinese Communist Party differed little from the Nationalists in viewing higher education entirely within the new political vision they had for China. From 1952, the Chinese higher education system simulated Soviet administration, teaching, methods, textbooks and even classroom design. The experience of other countries, especially those of the West, was rejected. What conception of the university or the socialist higher education system did Soviet advisors bring to their mission? As Hayhoe (1989) says, "It was an odd mixture of persisting features of European academicism, most notable in the conception of a comprehensive university as an institution devoted to pure science and arts disciplines only, and socialist economic planning which decreed the close integration of all professional training into the development plans of each major economic and bureaucratic sector" (p. 69).

From this definition, I think that there can be little doubt about the value of this Soviet-inspired higher education system and its contribution to China's rapid industrialization and general social development up to 1957. However, Soviet experts drew heavily on parallel materials used in the Soviet Union which often had little direct relevance to Chinese conditions (Hayhoe, 1988). Little wonder that this bridgehead of Soviet penetration came under fierce attack in the Great Cultural Revolution. In conscious reaction to the narrow fragmentation and exclusivist orientation towards expertise of Soviet patterns, *Mao Zedong* directed in 1957 that our educational policy must enable everyone to develop morally, intellectually and physically and become a worker with socialist consciousness and culture.

In general, two distinctive responses to Soviet academic penetration could be seen in the radicalism of the Great Leap Forward (大跃进) (GLP 1958 - 1966) and that of the Great Cultural Revolution (文化大革命) (1966 - 1976). The GLF might be regarded as a domestication of Soviet patterns, with an assertion of Chinese political and cultural identity in the new directions undertaken. The Great Cultural Revolution, by contrast, was an all-out destruction of Soviet patterns, which failed to offer anything of lasting values in their place (Hayhoe, 1989). Some of the seeds that produced this radical reaction in the sphere of education could be seen in the over-regimentation of the Soviet patterns adopted. If it had been a purely Confucian authoritarian regimentation, it might have been tolerated (Hayhoe, 1989).

When *Deng Xiaoping* (邓小平) reversed Maoist (*Mao Zedong* 毛泽东) policies in late 1976, he initiated reforms to modernize its education, and suggested that 'education should face modernization, the world and future'. Modernization in the form of westernization resumed and gradually gained momentum (Deng, 2011). A huge quantity of western educational theories and models had found their way into China, and were adapted to the special context. On the other hand, Confucianism enjoyed a robust rejuvenation, as indicated in 'culture craze' (文化热 *wenhua*) and 'national learning

craze’ (国学热 *guoxuere*), as “an indispensable cultural force that ushered China into the twenty-first century” (Hon, 2009, p. 530).

Therefore, for much of the twentieth century, Chinese universities were striving to ‘catch up’ with what were perceived as advanced standards elsewhere. Now finally in the early 21st century they are reaching a position of strength, where they might come to be seen as equal partners with universities in other parts of the world, and be expected to contribute insights and approaches to global problems based on China’s remarkable achievements in recent decades, as well as on the richness of its historical civilization. Recent university mergers have facilitated a significant increase in culturally based understanding through interdisciplinary studies, which support the emergence of a new ethos.

For a new Chinese ethos, which might bring new streams of creativity into the global community of scholarship to take shape, university leaders have strengthened their research into Chinese history, Chinese philosophy, Chinese medicine and related areas so as to make clear connections between their unique and rich heritage of scholarship and the cutting-edge scientific and social research being done in a western mode. As Hayhoe and Zha (2004) suggest, at the deepest level, this calls for a fundamental reconsideration of the history of scholarship between the May Fourth Movement of 1919 (五四运动) and the Great Cultural Revolution (文化大革命) of 1966, when the Confucian tradition was repudiated as feudalistic and a major barrier to modernization.

However, 2000 years of Confucian educational practices could not be destroyed in one decade. The revival of interest in Confucianism among philosophical circles around the world in recent decades constitutes a genuine challenge to contemporary Chinese universities. Globalisation was the catalyst for the Chinese culture to distinguish themselves from other nations, with their renewed market socialisation project, especially in the educational sphere. Confucian educational tradition was a harmonious model, which

“emphasizes humanity, moral cultivation of individuals, and cooperation of community members” (Song, 2012, p. 42). One Chinese university president, referring to the Confucian notion that ‘the *Junzi* agrees with others without being an echo (和而不同)’ (Book 13:23), made the point of ‘harmonious co-existence within diversity’ (Hu, 2001), and claimed that traditional Chinese culture might become a spiritual force in the third millennium supporting human beings in the pursuit of diversity within coexistence. It is this point that might be what brings Chinese universities back into the world community with a vision to be shared.

## **Characteristics of current Chinese university students**

### **Examination pressure**

A feature of the Chinese education system is the high selectivity of universities, which take only a few students from senior high schools. Only a small percentage of school leavers can go to university. While the university system is expanding greatly it cannot at present meet the demand for study. Large numbers of learners show high motivation, energetic enthusiasm and a coordinated effort to sit the National College Entrance Exam (NCEE), but not everyone will make it. A Chinese saying aptly describes sitting NCEE as one way to success: ‘An army crossing a one-log bridge (千军万马过独木桥)’. Accordingly, students coming to the university naturally expect to develop a higher level of knowledge and skills that build on school achievements. Chinese students tend to aim toward dutiful service to their family and community, and so succeeding in examination is a way of accomplishing this goal. Parents, other family members and schools tend to judge the students based on their demonstration of academic performance “without considering their health, well being, and integrity of personality” (Song, 2012, p. 64), and often place high and strict demands on them regardless of their actual abilities. Succeeding in examinations is seen as a key means of assessing achievement, and failing examinations is seen not only as a personal failure, but a failure that reflects negatively on one’s entire family. The one-child

policy of the Chinese government may have accentuated and contributed to the fierce competition that exists in China (Niu, 2007).

In the shadow of the traditional educational examination system, students live through the drill of preparing for various exams, all of which culminate in the NCEE. The ability to combat exam-related anxieties, and the endurance developed over years of exam-preparation may help Chinese students excel in exams in comparison with their western counterparts. However, an exam-driven knowledge-based education may result in a sacrifice of independent intellectual inquiry and creative thinking (Niu, 2007). Such an examination system also promotes homogeneity and may diminish students' motivation to pursue their own interests.

### **Access to various sources**

University students in China today have been born and raised in an era when China began her economic reform and opened her doors to the world. As Tam, Heng and Jiang (2009) observe, this generation of students has not experienced any major political turmoil. On the contrary, they have enjoyed much more freedom than their parents experienced in the 1960s and 1970s. With greater access to the outside world, the Chinese youth of today are exposed to different cultures and political ideologies. As a result of the one-child policy in China, the younger generation has been brought up in more permissive home environments. In the university setting, these students are taught by a growing number of university professors who have been educated outside China, and whose teaching approaches have been influenced by the education philosophies of western nations.

### **Shift of focus in official education policy**

Recently there is a move from knowledge-based examinations to aptitude measurements in China. This transition has not only affected the curriculum and pedagogical techniques, but has also prompted the amendment of educational policies. For example, the Chinese Ministry of Education recently

has initiated 'the Action Scheme for Invigorating Education Towards the twenty-first Century (面向 21 世纪教育振兴行动计划)'. Its first and most important part is the promotion of the 'Essential-qualities-oriented' or 'EQQ (*Suzhi jiaoyu* 素质教育) Education Project', which makes fostering students' innovative spirits and practical abilities the foremost concerns in twenty-first century education (Niu, 2007). To implement EQQ education, the Act suggests reforming the NCEE and other educational assessments to include more multiple-choice questions and the use of a process that is perceived to be more fair and scientific. Prioritizing innovation and practical skills is a big leap from the assumption of Chinese traditional education, which is driven by centralized educational exams emphasizing the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills.

### **Liberal education in Chinese universities**

Liberal education is education in culture or toward culture. 'Culture' originally referred to agriculture: the cultivation of the soil and its products, taking care of the soil, improving the soil in accordance with its nature. 'Culture', today, means derivatively, chiefly the cultivation of the mind, the taking care and improving of the native faculties of the mind in accordance with the nature of the mind (Strauss, 1959). So the finished product of a liberal education is a cultured human being.

Liberal education was advocated in the 19th century by thinkers such as John Henry Newman and Thomas Huxley, and has been described as a philosophy of education that empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a stronger sense of values, ethics, and civic engagement. Compared with a specific course or field of study, liberal education is a system of education characterised by challenging encounters with important issues, and is suitable for the cultivation of a free human being.

In its recent opening up to the capitalist world, China finds itself facing a dilemma similar to that of many other Third World countries. The government

support the introduction of scientific and technological knowledge that can be applied to rapid economic modernization, but wish to preserve political independence and cultural authenticity, in order to achieve modernization without westernization (Hayhoe, 1988). For example, when sending scholars and university students abroad, first pure sciences, then applied technological sciences were the major areas given official support.

My understanding is that the more reflective and theoretical social sciences and humanities areas play a more limited role in programs for scholarly exchange and study abroad in China. As Hayhoe (1988) argues, the simplistic notion that capitalist technology can be absorbed while the values of its socio-political context are screened out cannot be more than a convenient political posture. So the challenge facing Chinese intellectuals is to develop a critical understanding of the social, political and cultural value context of the science and technology.

During recent years, the Chinese government has moved forward in policy making of higher education. In particular, the government officially issued 'the Planning Outline of Mid-long Term Educational Reform and Development (中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要)' in July of 2010. In this outline, strong emphasis has been put on 'blend of liberal arts and science' (文理交融) (Panel of the Outline, 2010, p. 25). For this to happen, the Chinese government is widely implementing 'general education' or 'liberal education' (通识教育或博雅教育) in the area of innovative university personnel training.

Accordingly, a number of publications focus on liberal education in Chinese universities. Liang (2007) introduces a reform of the general education curriculum of Harvard University. This paper observes that internationalization is the heart of the ongoing reform and offers some suggestions for China universities. Zhang (2007) says that culture plays an important role in the process of internationalization, and general or liberal education in universities embodies such culture transformation; that Chinese

culture has an urgent need for a new input, for instance, with regard to more respect for individuality, truth-seeking and innovation. Du and Chen (2009) argue that as a part of undergraduate education, general or liberal education is developed and changed along with the Chinese society. Song (2013) suggests that general or liberal education acknowledges that higher education is not only a way of acquiring knowledge, but also a way to develop one's value of reason and to defend the spiritual basis of universities, and to pay attention to students' future lives.

How do we evaluate the outcome of this recent initiative? To what extent are these university students influenced by this macro change? Or do they generally continue to uphold the Confucian beliefs in their views of learning and teaching? Students enter higher education with preconceptions about learning, which are derived from upbringing and schooling. Given the current development of information and globalising movements, Chinese university students may "develop new beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviour patterns on the basis of new information obtained and cognitive redefinition" (Evans & Abbott, 1998, p. 163). This research, therefore, intends to explore how students' ideas, classroom behaviours and practices can be explained or understood in terms of Confucian ideas of learning. It seeks to identify Confucian-related ideas in students' classroom behaviours and accounts, attempts to explore the possible influences of such underlying ideas in students' learning practices, and tries to investigate how students weigh up or deliberate on the influence of Confucian values, coupled with other competing ideologies.

## **Problematism of the present status of Confucian values and learning**

In this section, I examine some debates and contradictory views with regard to Confucian ideas of learning, as reported in literature. By posing some

questions or problematising the present status of Confucian values, I explore how the influence of Confucianism became uncertain.

## **Debate over Confucian values**

Voluminous research on Confucianism has been conducted from various viewpoints such as geographical (Nisbett, 2005; Pierovich, 2009), historical (Fouts & Chan, 1995; Jiang, 2002), philosophical (Kim, 2002; Wang, 2007), empirical (Chen, 2009; Yu, 2008), comparative (Ames, 2003; Tan, 2003; Tweed & Lehman, 2002) and reinterpreted (Leung, 2003; Yan, 2004). Some of the studies which focus on the influence of Confucianism highlight the prevalence and weighting of one or a set of Confucian ideas/thoughts in various contexts such as school guidance and counselling (Hue, 2008), modern business (Koch, 2004; Pan, 2008), leadership (Son, 2000) and student learning (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Pratt, 1992). The studies have yielded different or even contrasting findings. For example, some researchers regard Confucian values as significant components of modern social-cultural attitudes affecting learning and communication practice in contemporary China (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Watkins & Biggs, 2001; Yao, 2000), while others argue that the influence of Confucianism on Chinese students' learning is declining and Confucianism may not be the guiding principle of norms and values in the university settings of modern China (Shi, 2006; Liu 2004). In this debatable area, this study will make contributions to the knowledge base.

## **Contradictory views of Chinese students' learning behaviours**

With an increasing number of Chinese learners pursuing higher education in western universities, the characteristics of Chinese students have raised many discussions and debates (Carson, 1992; Watkins & Biggs, 2001). Two contradictory views of students' learning behaviours are commonly reflected in the existing literature: that they are passive, quiet, submissive and

disciplined or that they value active thinking, are open-minded and have a spirit of inquiry.

Some researchers see the Chinese culture of learning as very different from, or even inferior to the western learning culture. For example, based on their own teaching experiences with Asian students, Ballard and Clanchy (1991) describe Chinese students as quiet, respectful of teachers and textbooks, and reluctant to ask questions or express their own opinions publicly. They think that these students learn by imitating others rather than by independent thinking; their learning, therefore, is seen as reproductive rather than analytical or speculative. Similar opinions are expressed by Carson (1992) who holds that Chinese learners rely heavily on memorising or rote learning. Carson and Nelson (1996) compare the difference between Chinese and US students during peer studies in a writing class. They argue that Chinese students avoid criticising their peers or claiming any authority. Chinese students try to maintain the harmony of the group rather than being critical. In addition, Chinese students are regarded as obedient to authority, which means that they look upon the teachers as the embodiment of knowledge and do not question them.

The above studies suggest that Chinese learners are defined by the following characteristics: passive in class, lacking in critical thinking and obedient to authority. Researchers holding such views tend to explain the characteristics of Chinese learners from a cultural point of view. They often implicitly or explicitly claim that the 'Chinese culture of learning' is heavily influenced by Confucianism, and even label it as 'Confucian-heritage learning culture' (Biggs, 1996).

Other researchers portray Chinese learners as actually valuing active and reflexive thinking, open-mindedness and a spirit of inquiry (Shi, 2006; Lee, 1996; Watkins & Biggs, 2001). They argue that the differences between Chinese learners and western learners are subtle rather than polarised. For instance, Chan (1997) reports on a study that compares the learning beliefs

and practices of university students from Chinese and Australian cultures. The results do not support the notions that Chinese learners are passive, uncritical, dependent, relying mainly on a surface, reproductive mode of learning. In contrast to this representation, Chinese learners are highly active; they monitor their studies, learn from their mistakes or link past experiences to their studies. Although it is rare for them to express their disagreement explicitly to their teachers, they do not accept teachers' information blindly.

From the above discussion, it can be seen that there are contradictory descriptions of Chinese students' learning behaviours. Many of the descriptions rely on literature reviews, secondary sources or personal experiences and most of them were published some time ago, with some of them even a decade old. Unlike these discussions, this present study examines the topic from an empirical perspective. It also takes into account the potential influences of a changing society on Chinese students' learning behaviours, as immense social changes have recently been taking place in China.

## **Confucian cultural values and globalization**

Modern nation states in the world are facing globalization and internationalization. When examining the capacity of modern states in the context of globalization, different scholars may have diverse interpretations (Mok, 2005). Some oppose the convergence thesis proposed by the strong globalists that modern states are declining in capacity under the impact of globalization. Instead, they believe that nation states still retain the ultimate claim of legal legitimacy within their territories even though they have to respond to external pressures generated by international laws and authorities (Jayasuriya, 2001).

Criticizing the strong globalists for overstating the impacts of globalization, other scholars have argued that there has not been sufficient empirical research evidence to develop a theory of the causal relationship between

globalization and the receding role of modern states (Hinnfors & Pierre, 1998; Rodrik, 1997). Meanwhile, a group of scholars have called for bringing the regional and national dimensions back into the analysis of changing state roles and new governance (Dale & Robertson, 2002; Evans & Harding, 1997; Sassen, 2007). They argue, instead, that national governments are far from diminished but are reconstituted and restructured in the growing complexity of processes of governance in the context of globalization (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999, pp. 7-9; Weiss, 1998).

## **Western competing ideologies in China**

Education, like other public policy areas, is affected by the same globalization processes. In China, with heavy weight being attached to globalization and internationalization in education, universities now encounter far more challenges, and are being subjected to an unprecedented level of external scrutiny. As Mok (2005) says,

In order to make individual nation-states more competitive, schools and universities in different parts of the globe have been under tremendous pressures from government and the general public to restructure/reinvent themselves in order to adapt to the ever-changing socio-economic and socio-political environments. (p. 59)

Thus, like elsewhere across the world, the term 'academic capitalism' is becoming increasingly significant in shaping the higher education sector in China. In addition, other notions such as 'managerial', 'neo-liberal', 'entrepreneurial universities' and 'campus inc.' are also used to conceptualize current changes in contemporary Chinese universities.

### **Neo-liberalism**

Neo-liberalism describes a market-driven approach to economic and social policy based on neo-classical theories of economics that stress the efficiency of private enterprise, liberalized trade and relatively open markets, and therefore seek to maximize the role of the private sector in determining the

political and economic priorities of the state. As George (2006) argues, the neo-liberal model concentrates on reducing the role of government in higher education and creating a market for individual institutions to compete against each other (George, 2006). The concerns of neo-liberal education strategists are summarized as:

The educational function of the future cannot be carried out through a routine, hierarchical structure, with teachers who think like civil servants and a society which is indifferent to the education system's financial needs. Autonomy, administrative responsibility, experimentation and close links with the community should be the features of all places where the education process is carried out (Riddell 1996, p. 1361).

The neo-liberal model requires higher levels of competition among educational institutions, less government intervention, increased non-government sources of funding (particularly for higher education), decentralisation of management away from the state and in favour of individual institutions, and the introduction of performance indicators to analyse the production of institutions. It tries to “produce more cost-effective, flexible institutions that are better able to supply the needs of the labour market” (George, 2006, p. 598).

In China, the situation is different as the model of education for development is underpinned by belief in the importance of education as a driver of economic growth. It demonstrates particular views on the desirable level of funding for different levels of education and for different branches of study, as well as the values and ethics that should underpin what is taught. Through education, it seeks to bring about this change through a planned process of significant government intervention and focused government funding (George, 2006).

### **Academic capitalism**

Higher education has expanded most rapidly. It has become a truly pervasive social fact — precisely when the elite academic and scientific culture

associated with the traditional university has come under most pressure (Scott, 1997). The supporters of academic capitalism think that the emerging knowledge market has destabilized the traditional patterns of university professional work. One of the major changes is that university faculties, who were previously situated between capital and labour, are now positioned squarely in the marketplace (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997).

Thus, it is necessary for a university to redefine its mission in order to adapt to the knowledge-based economy (Mok, 2005). As far as teaching goes, the mass university's responsibilities for developing high-level 'expert' skills in its students, and, more broadly, for socializing them into an academic culture. They now have to be shared with other agencies in the public and corporate sectors (Scott, 1997). As for research, the research paradigm characteristic of universities is no longer accepted unquestioningly as a generalizable account of how new knowledge is produced. Multidimensional, rather than linear, models of knowledge production are now preferred. The role of the market has been re-emphasized, and there is a growing recognition of the impact of application (Scott, 1997).

So, academic capitalism has influenced universities in different ways such as the orientation of the university, the development of subjects, personnel cultivation, the development pattern of academic research, and the management and governance of universities. As Scott (1997) points out, with the impact of academic capitalism, teachers' orientation and the central goal of a university have changed gradually. From the traditional point of view, the mission of a university is to create and to transmit knowledge, to lead the development of society, to cultivate virtue, and to educate excellent men and women. But market behaviours have driven the university to become a commercial company, which is not in accordance with the aim of seeking truth. Consequently and inevitably, teaching and learning have been affected.

This global power is pushing and pulling many universities to change profoundly. In the Chinese case, I think that with the rapid expansion of both

higher education institutions and number of students, the government has adopted to make its university systems more competitive and efficient in the global market context (Mok, 2005). For example, through implementing a series of policies of decentralization and marketization, the Chinese government has initiated fundamental changes in the orientation, financing, curriculum, and management of higher education.

Local governments in China therefore have seized on the decentralization policy and made use of the market and other non-state sources to fill the gap (Mok, 2005). In fact, the implementation of the decentralization policy has allowed individual higher education institutions more flexibility and autonomy and empowered local governments to chart the course of higher education development in response to the local needs.

In general, these western ideologies including the 'neo-liberal' model and academic capitalism are based on emerging trends in higher education management in developed countries such as Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. In China, few scholars have conducted empirical studies on this issue except by introducing western academic capitalism theory (Tang & Wang, 2009; Gao, 2010). If the most developed economies in the world are increasingly tending towards the models, and many aspiring giants are following them, should there be any hesitation for all countries to move in this direction? How about universities in China? To answer this question, in this empirical research, I attempt to investigate how university students in contemporary China explain or understand the impact of some western ideologies in their learning practices, and to explore how the students weigh up or deliberate on the impact, along with the Chinese culture of learning.

### **Confucian culture in the process of globalization**

In the epoch of globalization and internationalization, the world is a much easier place in which to transmit ideas and data at a moment's notice, and boundaries and borders are more porous and transparent to outside policy

making influences. The rising tide of human capital theory has led to increasing demands for “efficiency” and “accountability” in higher educational settings around the world (Hayhoe & Zha, 2004). Universities are drawn inexorably into a global culture with pressure for a kind of homogenization around the cutting edge of scientific knowledge. Common patterns of massification, differentiation and decentralization are emerging. At the same time, the insistent pressure of what one scholar has called a “global technoculture” has led to strong reactions in some places, in the form of the determination to keep alive the local and indigenous knowledge that gives cultural roots and a sense of identity.

Fouts and Chan (1995) argue that a sense of ambivalence runs throughout modern Chinese history, demonstrating the coexistence of positive and negative feelings that most Chinese have toward the western world. On the one hand, there is a traditional Chinese disdain for the culture and values of the West; on the other hand, there is an admiration for its technological accomplishments. As they point out, consequently, “the Chinese have recognized the need to modernize their society, while at the same time attempting to maintain many traditional Chinese values and ways.” (p. 528)

Does the force of globalisation change a country’s inherent culture? How does the Confucian cultural inheritance survive at this crucial time? How does Chinese traditional education, influenced by the West, affect contemporary Chinese university students’ lives and learning? Taking into account the complexities of such emerging and compelling factors in the era of globalisation and internationalisation, as well as the advocacy of Confucian values and thoughts (e.g., harmony, morality) in contemporary China, this investigation is timely and needed.

## **Calls for research**

Research materials in Hue’s study (2008) suggest that the influence of Confucianism is prominent, as its key principles are incorporated into

teachers' personal systems of counseling. The research results illuminate the influence of Chinese culture in Hong Kong schools. The author points out that the direction of further research in this area at an individual as well as a whole-school level is to explore the influence of philosophical and cultural values on students in their "search for the improvement of the self" (p. 314). Similarly, Haggis (2009) notices that "there is as yet little research that attempts to document different types of dynamic interaction and process through time in relation to 'learning' situations in higher education" and sees a need to step into the unknown "if we are serious about trying to do justice to our students in terms of understanding what we currently deem to be 'their' learning" (p. 389).

## **Development of learning conceptions and situating this study**

Although awareness of the effect of hidden cultures establishes a useful starting point of this study (Watkins & Biggs, 1996; 2001), culture is not the only determinant of learning behaviours and practices. Other aspects of the process such as the backgrounds and goals of the learner, their specific motivation for learning, the setting for the interaction, and the nature of the relationship between teachers and learners, are also influential. A static view of a particular group of learners tends to obscure the importance of these factors as participants may also learn and behave differently in different situations, according to personal needs and situational demands (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006, p. 75). Therefore, in this part, I begin with a scrutiny of learning conception; I adopt the perspective that participants in this study may have certain identifiable characteristics, some of which might be related to the cultural heritage of Confucianism and then I situate the study.

### **Conception: a what-aspect and a how-aspect**

There is a voluminous body of research examining students' conceptions of learning. But what is 'conception'? A 'conception' can be defined as the

fundamental way a person understands a phenomenon or an object in the surrounding world (Marton, Dall'Alba & Beaty, 1993). It is not visible but can be seen as a qualitative relationship between an individual and some phenomenon (Eklund-Myrskog, 1998).

In phenomenography, the term 'conception' is thus of fundamental importance. Conceptions are described in terms of their content – there is always something that is conceived and consequently it is not possible to talk about conceptions in general. The two parts – what is conceived and how it is conceived – together form the core of the phenomenon. In phenomenography both a what-aspect and a how-aspect of a conception are discerned: the what-aspect refers to the meaning content, while the how-aspect refers to the way of understanding the object. The what-aspect is the pre-condition of the how-aspect, in that it is necessary to have a conception of what a phenomenon is before one can discuss how it is constructed. The what- and how-aspects are, however, internally related to each other and cannot be separated. Within phenomenography, the aim is then on the one hand to describe individuals' conceptions and on the other hand to describe similarities and differences between these conceptions (Larsson 1986; Uljens 1988, 17–21, cited in Eklund-Myrskog, 1998).

According to Marton (1981), a main feature of the phenomenographic approach is the distinction between a first-order and a second-order perspective. "From the first-order perspective we aim at describing various aspects of the world and from the second-order perspective ... we aim at describing people's experience of various aspects of the world" (p. 177). That is, in a first-order perspective, we orient ourselves towards the world and make statements about it. The intention is to describe the world 'as it is'. In a second order perspective, we orient ourselves towards people's ideas about the world (or their experience of it) and we make statements about people's ideas about the world (or about their experience of it). The aim is to describe

how individuals conceive phenomena in the world around them, i.e., to describe phenomena as they appear to those individuals.

The purpose of my research is to put forward arguments in the nature of the second-order perspective. However, as the two perspectives are complementary, my study includes both. There are two related reasons for arguing in the nature of the second-order. Firstly and most obviously, I consider that to find out the different ways in which students experience, interpret, understand, apprehend, perceive or conceptualize various aspects of reality is sufficiently interesting in itself. Secondly, the descriptions we arrive at from the second-order perspective are autonomous in the sense that they cannot be derived from descriptions arrived at from the first-order perspective. This means that if we are interested in how students think about learning, then we have to investigate this very problem because the answer cannot be derived from what we know, but from what students do and how they interpret or conceptualize what they do.

## **Six learning conceptions and other determinants of learning**

The pioneering work in research into how students conceptualize learning was done by Perry (1970, cited in Eklund-Myrskog, 1998), who investigated students' intellectual development during the course of tertiary study. Since then, many studies have then been carried out aiming at describing individuals' conceptions of learning. After interviewing and questioning 90 individuals in Sweden, using the question: "What do you actually mean by learning?", Saljo (1979) identified five conceptions of learning.

According to the first conception, learning is seen as an increase of knowledge. The conception has similarities with the second one, according to which learning is seen as memorizing. In the third conception, learning is understood as the acquisition of facts and procedures, which can be retained and/or utilized in practice. In the remaining two conceptions, the reproductive

nature of learning is replaced by conceptions in which the emphasis is on learning as a constructive activity. According to the fourth conception, learning is seen as the abstraction of meaning and in the fifth conception, learning is understood as an interpretative process aiming at an understanding of reality. Saljo's (1979) categorization has been supported by other studies. Marton, Dall'Alba and Beaty (1993) identify a new conception and Saljo's categorization is reconstructed. According to this sixth conception, learning is seen as a personal change, adding an existential aspect to learning.

Judging the results from different studies, Eklund-Myrskog (1998) argues that "it seems that culture does not determine the content of the learning conception in any absolute sense" (p. 300). Without considering cultural factors, Entwistle (2000) describes a model in which he discerns three groups of influencing factors on student learning: students' characteristics, teaching characteristics and departmental characteristics. Among the student characteristics he mentions prior knowledge, intellectual abilities, learning style and personality, as well as attitudes to courses, motivation, work habits, and study skills. Teaching characteristics encompass level, pace, structure, clarity, explanation, enthusiasm and empathy. To departmental characteristics belong course design and objectives, learning materials, assessment procedures, workload, freedom of choice and study skills support. Vermunt (2005) also states that students' learning patterns are indeed associated with personal and contextual factors such as academic discipline, prior education, age and gender, but does not mention cultural aspects.

### **Chinese learning culture and situating this study**

Culture does provide tools, habits and assumptions that pervasively influence human thought and behaviour, and the task of learning does not escape this influence (Brislin, Bochner & Lonner, 1975; Bruner, 1996; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). To discuss some issues of Asian students in western educational institutions, Tweed and Lehman (2002) address two terms 'culturally Western' and 'culturally Chinese'.

Most research comparing culturally Chinese and culturally Western learners has examined surface and deep approaches to learning, the distinction having roots in Marton and Saljo's (1976) qualitative research conducted in the West. As discussed previously, westerners frequently culturally misperceive Chinese study methods. Some western instructors believe that culturally Chinese students tend to take a shallow approach to learning. For example, over thirty percent of Australian instructors surveyed by Samuelowicz (1987) felt that Asian students wanted to rote learn and did not want to think. Other observers have characterized Asian learning as passive (Barker, Child, Gallois, Jones & Callan, 1991). Pratt, Kelly and Wong (1999) reported that western instructors in Hong Kong sometimes disparaged Chinese approaches to learning as overly instrumental and accused culturally Chinese learners of being unwilling to think deeply. These negative evaluations of Asian approaches to learning are typical of western instructors (Biggs, 1996). These instructors tend to assume that deep learning which is in relation to understanding, is intrinsically motivated, and is to find pleasure in the act of studying or to feel a need to know truth. In contrast, a more instrumental conception of learning, viewing learning as a means to an end, which is represented in the surface level of learning, is regarded as part of the Confucian conception of learning.

However, the results of other researchers have shown differences. Biggs (1987) used a Study Process Questionnaire (SPQ) and expected to find Chinese students high on the surface subscale and low on the deep subscale. He found the opposite. Others (Kember & Gow, 1991) also have detected SPQ patterns suggesting that culturally Chinese students take a deeper approach to learning than culturally western students do. Culturally Chinese students often use memorization not as an end in itself but as a path to understanding. Likewise, Kember (1996) argues that culturally Chinese students often combine strategies for memorization with strategies for understanding.

These studies contribute to a better understanding of Chinese learning culture in general in this field of research. However, the majority of the studies reviewed that explicitly focused on Confucian values in learning were conducted in western countries. Chinese students in these countries study in different contexts and experience different cultural conflicts. Thus, in comparison with the aim and characteristics of my research, these studies may have provided an incomplete picture of academics in a China's tertiary context. While anticipating that findings from investigations undertaken in other countries could be generalised to, or have implications for students in mainland China, the distinctive features of China's national environment, cultures, institutions, departments, subjects and student characteristics need to be taken into account. The uniqueness of higher education in China and the characteristics of the university within which my research was conducted might contribute to the diversity and richness of the knowledge base.

Some researchers have already undertaken related investigations in China's educational contexts (e.g. Marton, Wen & Wong, 2005; Wu, 2011; Huang, 2011; Liu, 2011; Cheng, 2011; Cheng & Xu, 2011). Attention was also paid to the fact that a range of studies that had immediate relevance to my study were underway in universities. For example, Cheng (2011) reveals that Confucian pedagogy is consistent with contemporary understanding of human learning, and therefore, 'modern theories of learning are just a re-discovery of Confucian pedagogy' (p. 593). However, Cheng's work (2011) is not originally intended for cultural empirical research into learning, but for the pedagogical comparison between East and West. In contrast, the framework of my research is constructed with cultural research into learning in mind.

Wu (2011) explores the cultural differences of linguistic world-views on knowledge and education between the East and the West, and examines the impact of the cultural transformation of pedagogic discourse on education in modern China. He argues that contemporary Chinese pedagogic discourse is 'articulated in westernized discourses that have been normalized as China's

own' (p. 569). Wu concludes the article by calling for finding the 'Way' back to the authentic Chinese language in order to recover the authentic Chinese pedagogic discourse. However, the study takes the philosophical perspective of language to ask what kind of pedagogy is embraced by language traditionally.

My research took account of the changing context of tertiary education in China. I checked the generalisation of some findings to the tertiary context in China to see whether a similar influence of cultural inheritance prevail in the lives of university students, and what might be distinctive when particular regimes are operating in relation to learning practice. In addition, my research was conducted in a university in the central part of the country which is widely regarded as the cradle of Chinese civilization (details in Chapter 3). Although universities share some features, this university has its distinctive view of teaching and learning, and places particular emphasis on its priorities, which potentially impinge on the students who study in it. I anticipate the possibility that these features are distinctive to this particular university in China, somehow different from those described by other researchers.

My research builds on the existing literature and has the potential to make a contribution to this research field through an expansion of instances and aspects of Confucian related ideas. It is based on the assumption that while different aspects of Confucian values have been investigated, some aspects are yet to be identified. Confucian ideas of learning may remain influential to Chinese learners in the research context with distinctive features. Furthermore, my research seeks to investigate the interplay between different sources of thoughts, students' deliberations of their interaction with perceived heritage, how Confucian values shape students' learning practices, how they make explanations for their observed classroom behaviours, how their explanations, descriptions and accounts reflect Confucian ideas of learning, and how they understand, weigh up or deliberate on the influence of Confucian values, coupled with other competing ideologies. My theoretical

perspectives, as presented in the following chapter, assisted me to theorize the phenomenon under investigation, moving towards a deeper understanding of Confucian values exercised in the context where university students find themselves.

## **Chapter 3 The theoretical framework, methods and design of the study**

The Master said, “Is it not a pleasure, having learned something, to try it out at due intervals? (子曰: 学而时习之, 不亦说乎?)” (Book 1:1, the *Analects*, 2008)

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, to begin with I outline my views about the nature of knowledge and reality, and the theoretical perspectives on which I based my initial decisions about the methodology of this research. Next, I address the research context and methods, and discuss related issues such as details of observations, the process of interview transcriptions, the perspectives and techniques of the analysis of the research materials, and research ethics and rigour. I then summarize the structure of presenting and discussing the research results and present the rationale for the following chapter.

It should be noted at the beginning that the methodology to a certain extent was developing as the research progressed. While I had clear ideas about how I should plan and carry out the study, some aspects and research approaches were changed along the research journey.

### **Theoretical orientation**

There is no definitive way to categorize the various theoretical and philosophical perspectives that have influenced and that distinguish types of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (2003) identify five alternative inquiry paradigms: positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, constructivism and participatory. Schwandt (2003) discusses three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: interpretivism, hermeneutics and social constructionism. Crotty (1998) also offers three primary epistemological influences: objectivism, constructionism and subjectivism. These, he posits, have influenced in varying degrees different theoretical perspectives: positivism (postpositivism), interpretivism (symbolic interaction,

phenomenology and hermeneutics), critical inquiry, feminism and postmodernism. Creswell (2007) distinguishes five qualitative traditions of inquiry: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study.

I acknowledge that there is some overlap among these frameworks. As Crotty (1998) argues, realism in ontology and constructionism in epistemology turn out to be quite compatible, and ontology sits alongside epistemology, informing the theoretical perspective; each theoretical perspective “embodies a certain way of understanding of what is (ontology) as well as a certain way of understanding what it means to know (epistemology)” (p. 10).

So this present research, in contrast with the work of qualitative theorists cited above, distinguishes theoretical perspectives by my research questions. To be sure, reducing any complex and multifaceted discipline to a single research question oversimplifies because among the above frameworks, “there are also important differences reflecting varying experiences with and emphases within the history of qualitative research” (Patton, 2002, p. 79). This means that some scholars prefer to separate paradigms from philosophies from theoretical orientations from design strategies. For example, social constructivism may be considered as a paradigm, ethnography may be viewed as a research strategy, and symbolic interactionism may be examined as a theoretical framework (Patton, 2002). However, distinctions between paradigmatic, strategic and theoretical dimensions within any particular approach are both arguable and somewhat arbitrary (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I have circumvented those distinctions by focusing on my research questions as the basis for understanding and contrasting long-standing and emergent qualitative inquiry approaches.

In fact, philosophical issues are integral to the research process and constitute “what researchers ‘silent think’ about research” (Scott & Usher, 1999, p. 10). In other words, qualitative research starts from a philosophical perspective (Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCulloch & Sikes, 2005, p. 104). So in the

course of endeavouring to identify, to clarify and to articulate my epistemological stances and theoretical viewpoints, I became more reflective and rational in making decisions about research design and application of specific techniques (Creswell, 2003; Darkenwald & Merrian, 1982; Etherington, 2004; Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006). Furthermore, as I wanted my participants to make explicit their views and inner thinking, thus acting both ethically and in accordance with the principles underpinning qualitative research, it was fair that I revealed my own assumptions, in particular those most relevant to this research topic. Some shifts in the focus of my views occurred as the study proceeded, as discussed in later chapters.

## **Constructivism**

Among the diverse competing ideological positions (Alexander, 2006; Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2003), I acknowledge a commitment to constructivism. Crotty (1998) says that “It would appear useful, then, to reserve the term *constructivism* for the epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on ‘the meaning-making activity of the individual mind’” (p. 58). This means that constructivism highlights the unique experience of each of us, and suggests that “each one’s way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other” (p. 58).

Within contrasting epistemologies associated with constructivism (Geelan, 1997; Kanuka & Anderson, 1999; Muthu, 2006; Perkins, 1999; Windschitl, 2002), I realize that when human beings engage with a reality and make sense of it, they are likely to understand the same reality in different ways; therefore, there are as many realities as there are conceptions of it – multiple realities (Admiraal & Wubbels, 2005; Creswell, 2007). Contradictory ways in which reality is conceived may be attributed to a wide range of factors including ideological traditions, perceptions of surroundings, human experiences, interpretations of experiences and personal practical interests.

That is, I believe that reality is socially constructed and subjectively determined; “the existence of a world without a mind is conceivable. Meaning without a mind is not” (Crotty, 1998, pp. 10-11)—“no projects mean no constraints and enablements” (Archer, 2003a, p. 8); meanings are “constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 1998, p. 43) and are born “in and out of the interaction between subject and object” (p. 45). As Archer (2003a) points out, “Courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of agents who *subjectively* determine their practical projects in relation to their *objective* circumstances” (Archer, 2003a, p. 135). Thus, this present study is not only an individual activity but also a social practice; the methods I employ in research which involve an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), are to discover how those constructions occur, how students explain them in different ways, how participants understand the reasons governing why or how students made choices about their learning actions (Stake, 1995), how students, as functioning human beings, place meanings on the events, processes and structures of their lives (Creswell, 2007), in particular, on the Confucian ideas of learning and how intended and unintended consequences produced by students’ interactions lead to structural and cultural elaboration, reproduction or transformation (Archer, 2003a).

## **Hermeneutics**

While constructivism guided my views about the nature of knowledge and reality, hermeneutic interpretivism provided the theoretical framework for the conduct of the empirical section of the qualitative study (Crotty, 1998). This choice was based on the topic of this study and echoed traditional hermeneutic concerns; originally concerned with the study of the interpretation of the Bible, hermeneutics included the study of ancient and classical cultures. So hermeneutics is itself the art of text interpretation. This decision was also based on my research questions and resonated with the

proposition that “all [qualitative] research is interpretative, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” as argued by Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 13). An interpretive approach seeks to explain how people attribute meaning to their circumstances, and how they develop and make use of rules that govern their behaviours. The interpretive conceptions of research assume that there will be no absolute answers and emphasise the need for qualitative data. This position was further supported by Schwandt (1994):

... to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it. The inquirer must elucidate the process of meaning construction and clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of social actors. To prepare an interpretation is itself to construct a reading of these meanings; it is to offer the inquirer’s construction of the constructions of the actors one studies. (p. 118)

I was ‘constructing’ the accounts of situations which could be understood as the ‘constructions’ of participants in this research. The students were constructing their insights and practices regarding the influence of Confucian values on their learning.

## **Grounded theory**

With this theoretical perspective, in order to capture the insights and practices of university students about the influence of Confucian values on their learning, grounded theory was chosen, and then observation, interview and document analysis were employed in the collection of research materials.

Grounded theory contains key elements of analytical induction theory and assures a connection between data and a theoretical premise (Crotty, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1997); it also seeks to ensure that research findings and theories are inductively derived from the study of information collected. Its emphases are on the data and theories arising from the data. In this study, principles of grounded theory guided the selection of participants, collecting research materials, analysing and theorising research

materials, the conceptual coding, comparative analysis and theoretical sampling of the research materials in order to highlight abstractions and interconnections between the collected information. I discuss the application of grounded theory further in relation to each step of the analysis process of research materials.

This research was to explore underlying Confucian values in one Chinese university. I observed the behaviours of participants (what they do in their practices) and the discourse of participants' speech (what they say about learning and teaching) against a historical pattern. Based on what they did and what they said, I tried to identify how much was related to Confucian elements. The main source of research materials for this research was obtained from multiple sources of information such as observations, individual interviews and document analysis (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998).

Therefore, adaptation of grounded theory is because this inquiry was directed towards the survival of certain theories (i. e. Confucian principles). These became the fundamental categories of analysis. The categories/theories did not emerge from 'the ground'. Grounded theory directed me into on-going group life to know what is going on in it. It took me close to the real world so that the results and findings are grounded in the empirical world (observation and interviews). It provided me with analytical tools for handling masses of raw data, and helped me consider alternative meanings of phenomenon under investigated (Patton, 2002).

## **University context**

The university where participants studied is located in *Zhengzhou* (郑州), the capital city of Henan (河南) province, and was selected as one of the national 211 project key universities in 1996. Henan province is situated in the central part of China, the birthplace of Chinese civilization with over 5,000 years of history; it remained China's cultural, economic and political centre until approximately 1,000 years ago. Numerous legacies have been left including

the ruins of Shang Dynasty capital city *Yin* (殷墟) and the *Shaolin* (少林) Temple. Four of the Eight Great Ancient Capitals of China, *Luoyang* (洛阳), *Anyang* (安阳), *Kaifeng* (开封) and *Zhengzhou* (郑州) are located in Henan. However, Henan is considered to be one of the more backward areas in China as its economy is not thriving and high-tech industry is underdeveloped, compared with other eastern provinces.

As a leading educational institution in the province of Henan, the university plays a significant educational role in this area, declares its strong regional commitment, and endeavours to link teaching and learning to the economic and cultural development of the province as well as of the country. This cultural connection and strategic commitments are not only evident in the university website (see [www.zzu.edu.cn](http://www.zzu.edu.cn)) and policy documents, but also symbolized in the design of the campus. There are two main streets in the new campus of the university named '*Tianjian* (天健)' and '*Houde* (厚德)'. There is also a sign of '*Houde zaiwu* (厚德载物)' set up in front of the library. These Chinese phrases originate from *Yijing* (易经), one of the Confucian classics. They mean that the cosmos is robust and vigorous, and the earth is liberal and generous. Thus, for the gentlemen (*Junzi*, 君子), when they learn and behave, they should possess virtues to contain everything like the earth, and should also show perseverance like the cosmos. These logos attract students' attention every day, and remind students of the rich history of the university.

In this context, the university has realized that cultural learning and development is not simply a forced condition of new policy times, but a central part of institutional identity. Some related documents were reviewed later in the section of documentary analysis.

## **Participants**

The participants were 12 postgraduate students (S1 - S12) in the university where I work. I used purposive sampling to identify my research participants because it enabled me to incorporate my research interest and purpose

(Robson, 2002) and to select participants that I could “learn the most from” (Patton, 2002, p. 233). A deeper understanding of the purposeful sample of the possible can be attained to address the central questions of research (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002).

## Selecting students

I used snowballing or chain sampling strategies (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000) in this research, asking participants to recommend other information-rich individuals. Accordingly, I used my personal contacts i.e. colleagues in the university to assist me in identifying participants.

Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their accounts. In selecting students to interview, the aim was to include an appropriate range and balance across the following criteria (Figure 3. 1):

| Participants | Disciplinary background      | Ages | Gender | Family background  |
|--------------|------------------------------|------|--------|--------------------|
| S1           | School of foreign language   | 23   | Female | Countryside, Henan |
| S2           | School of foreign language   | 24   | Male   | Countryside, Henan |
| S3           | School of foreign language   | 23   | Female | Town, Henan        |
| S4           | School of architecture       | 23   | Male   | City, Henan        |
| S5           | School of architecture       | 24   | Female | Countryside, Henan |
| S6           | School of architecture       | 23   | Female | Town, Henan        |
| S7           | School of medicine           | 23   | Male   | Countryside, Henan |
| S8           | School of medicine           | 23   | Female | Countryside, Henan |
| S9           | School of medicine           | 23   | Female | Town, Henan        |
| S10          | School of Chinese literature | 23   | Female | Countryside, Henan |
| S11          | School of Chinese literature | 24   | Female | Town, Henan        |
| S12          | School of Chinese literature | 24   | Female | City, Henan        |

Figure 3.1: The information about participants

I approached potential participants with the participant information sheet and consent form, and informed them about the research project and

research procedures. Upon receiving the completed and signed consent form from participants, the collection of research materials started.

### **Saturation of participants**

Theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1999) was a primary criterion in determining how many students were to be involved in this study, as “saturation is the key to excellent qualitative work” (Morse, 1995, p. 147). However, the literature provided “no description of how saturation might be determined and no practical guidelines for estimating sample sizes for purposively sampled interviews” (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006, p. 60).

A few studies provide guidelines for actual sample sizes but they yield different ranges: Creswell (2007) recommends between five and 25 interviews for a phenomenological study and 20 to 30 for a grounded theory study; Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) make evidence-based recommendations suggesting that among 60 interviews, the first 12 may be sufficient to obtain meaningful and useful interpretations. In this study, the size of the sample was determined by consideration of the information collected. The data collection was brought to an end “when no new information is forthcoming from newly sampled units” (Lincoln & Guba, 2003, p. 202). Although I believed that there was always new information given the uniqueness of each individual, the focus of the research topic was my main concern.

In general, selecting participants was not random. I did not go for the general population all over China, but go for postgraduate students in a university in the central China. I asked other supervisors to recruit respondents. Postgraduate students responded to a request mentioning Confucianism. So they were already interested in the topic of my research. They were not highly selected, but sub-selected.

I had 20 respondents, but in the first 12 students, I reached the saturation. In other words, nothing new was coming after I interviewed 12 respondents. As

Mason (2010) says, samples for qualitative studies are generally much smaller than those used in quantitative studies because qualitative research is concerned with meaning and not making generalised hypothesis statements (Mason, 2010). I recognized that the sample needs to be of sufficient size to gain insights, but the meaning regarding my research aims and results without undue repetition were most important.

The aims of the study are the ultimate driver of the sample size (Charmaz, 2006). She suggests that a small study with "modest claims" (p.114) might achieve saturation quicker than a study that is aiming to describe a process that spans disciplines (for example describing drug addiction in a specific group rather than a description of general addiction).

Strauss and Corbin (1997) say that saturation is a "matter of degree" (p.136). They conclude that saturation should be more concerned with reaching the point where it becomes "counter-productive" and that "the new" is discovered does not necessarily add anything to the overall story, model, theory or framework (p.136). They admit that sometimes the problem of developing a conclusion to their work is not necessarily a lack of data but an excess of it. As the analysis begins to take shape it is important for the researcher to become more disciplined and cut data where necessary. Therefore, in my study, I became counter-productive in the first 12, and decided to cut interviews when necessary.

## **Methods**

In this study, multiple sources of research materials were sought to provide a comprehensive perspective on the exploration of students' learning behaviours, ideas and practices. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) identified:

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials - case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts - that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2)

Therefore, a combination of individual in-depth interview, observations and document analysis were used to collect data and to validate and crosscheck findings (Patton, 2002, p. 306). The strengths of one approach compensate for the weakness of another approach, increasing the validity of data and trustworthiness of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The aim of my research is to explore the experiences of students regarding their learning behaviours and practices, and their reflection and explanations on these activities. I am concerned with the individual student's ideas and practices. These three kinds of qualitative research data collection are considered to be consistent with the nature of my research and enable me to discover motives and meanings of students through my connections with them, to know that I could never 'know' – in the sense that I 'know' my own thoughts and feelings – what another person's experience is 'really' like. I believe that I could "get closer to his/her perspective through detailed interviewing and observations" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 10).

## **Observation**

Observation offers the opportunity to record and to analyse behaviours and interactions as they occur, and allows events, actions and experiences and so on to be seen through the eyes of the researcher without any construction on the part of those involved. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) say, it is a process of gathering direct and real data by observing individuals and places at a research site. By conducting observations, researchers have the opportunity to record information as it occurs in a setting, to examine actual behaviours, and to study individuals who have difficulty verbalizing their ideas through interviewing (Creswell, 2003).

I asked permission to sit in the classes and got to know the students during the breaks or after class. In this way rapport and a sense of trust was built up. I began the study as an 'onlooker' (Patton, 2002, p. 265) and gradually

became more involved as the research progressed. Wolcott (1990, 2009) lists useful generic starter questions for anyone starting the observation phase of their research. Such questions would guide me to think about cultural acquisition.

- What is going on here?
- What do students in this classroom have to know in order to do what they are doing?
- How are skills and attitudes transmitted and acquired, particularly in the absence of intentioned efforts and instructions?

I observed four learning activities: 1) a workshop at the school of architecture; 2) a normal lecture at the school of foreign languages; 3) a learning activity organized by students; 4) a normal lecture at the school of medicine. During the four observations, I tended to shy away from 'why' and ensured that my efforts were focused on emphasizing 'how' these learning activities proceeded. Then I described them but did not explain them. I left the question 'why' for later observations and analysis. I used the idea of 'anthropological strangeness' (Tolich & Davidson, 1999) to help me treat all observations as unusual, as though I was seeing this world for the first time although I had been teaching in the university for many years.

Although observing in the classroom was often detailed and tedious work, I believed that the core of social life was communicated through the mundane, trivial and everyday minutiae. This was what people often overlooked, but I thought that I needed to learn how to notice it. I tried to record such details because something of significance might be discovered. It was better to err by including everything than to ignore potentially important details.

There are many types of data recording. Tolich and Davidson (1999) suggest three types: jotted notes, mental notes and expanded notes. I divided my observation notes into five levels according to Neuman (2000): jotted notes,

direct observation notes, researcher inference notes, analytic notes and personal notes, as shown in the following figure (Figure 3.2).

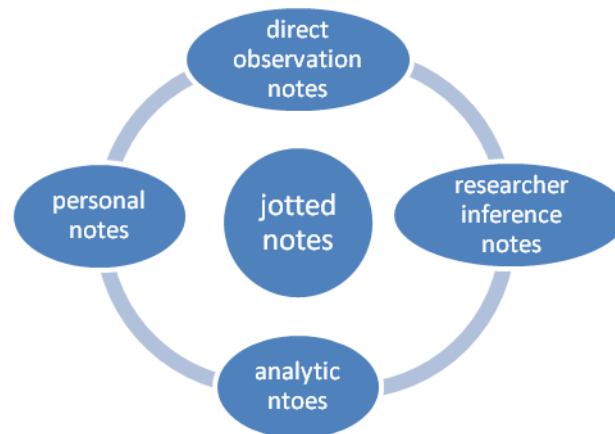


Figure 3.2: The five types of observation data recording

Jotted notes were written in the classrooms. I used a notebook small enough to fit into my pocket. After arriving at the classrooms, I staked out the territory and located a good place. I let my eyes wander about, noticing everybody and everything, describing anonymously what was being done by the students and the lecturers, and recording it all in my jotted notes. These notes were 'scribbled as quickly as possible' (Tolich & Davidson, 1999, p. 129) and were incorporated into direct observation notes.

Direct observation notes were the basic source I wrote immediately after leaving the classrooms. These notes were written or typed using full sentences and ordered chronologically with the date, time and the place on each entry. They served as a detailed description of what I heard and saw in concrete and specific terms. I put concrete details in notes not summaries. I looked and listened without inferring or imposing any interpretations.

Researcher inference notes were keyed to direct observations and written in a separate section. Neuman (2000) says that people never see social relationships, emotions or meanings. They see specific physical actions and hear words; then they use background cultural knowledge, clues from the context, and what is done or said to assign social meanings. Although they

infer social meanings, not always correctly, people constantly do so on the basis of what they see and hear. I kept the inferred meaning separate from direct observation because the meaning of actions was not always self-evident. As Neuman (2000) says, "The separation of inference allows multiple meanings to arise upon rereading direct observation notes" (p. 365).

Analytic notes were part of theoretical memos and were a running account of my attempts to give meaning to field events (Neuman, 2000). They were systematic digressions into theory, where I elaborated on ideas in depth, expanded on ideas while still in the classrooms, and modified or developed more complex theory by rereading and thinking about the notes.

Personal notes were personal feelings and emotional reactions, which were part of data for colouring what I saw or heard in the field (Mutch, 2007). I kept a section of notes, which was like a personal journal. I recorded personal life events and feelings in it.

Through observation, I understood and captured the context within which participants' learning happened. By being on-site, I was more open and discovery oriented, rather than relying on prior conceptualisations or perceptions of what was happening which might result from interviewing (Opie, 2004). Furthermore, my impression, reflection and introspection of observation permitted me to draw on personal knowledge and became part of the data to be used in attempting to understand the research context and participants who inhabited it (Patton, 2002).

Therefore, my observation notes included both my empirical observation and my interpretations of them. As Babbie (2010) argues, 'record what you 'know' has happened and what you 'think' has happened' (p. 324). These notes showed concrete details in classrooms and suggested links between ideas. For each learning activity, I described what I heard and saw in classrooms, offered connection from the *Analects*, and provided introductory interpretive comments.

In this study, I wrote the observation notes based on three steps: I listened and observed without applying analytical categories; I compared what was heard to what was heard at other times and to what others said; then I applied my own interpretation to infer or figured out what it meant, and tended to capture the two main issues of interest to me:

- Examples of students learning, interacting, speaking or behaving in the classes.
- Examples of how students use specific methods or techniques to show their learning culture or some influences of other ideologies.

These themes were informed by my interest (part of the main research question) in how Chinese students learned in classrooms and how these classroom behaviours and practices could be explained or understood in terms of Confucian ideas of learning.

### **In-depth interview**

Following on observations, individual in-depth interviews were conducted to raise participants' awareness (Robson, 2002), to facilitate them to construct meaning (Bryman, 2006) and to gain "a thoughtful answer based on considerable evidence as well as getting full consideration of a topic from diverse points of view" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 76). Personal accounts were seen as having central importance because of the power of language to illuminate meaning (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Anderson (1998) defines an interview as "a specialized form of communication between people for a specific purpose associated with some agreed subject matter" (p. 222). Kvale (1996) also suggests:

The qualitative research interview is the construction site of knowledge. An interview is literally inter view, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest. (p. 2)

From the above definitions, a qualitative interview is an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry, including the topics to be covered. It is a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent (Babbie, 2010, p. 320). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) suggest that research interviews serve three purposes: they are principal ways of gathering information relating to the research objectives; they can be used to test hypotheses (or to suggest new ones); and they can be used to support other methods (e.g., to triangulate data or go deeper into elements uncovered by other methods).

The interview consists of a reconstruction of life experiences that the participant might feel is relevant to their present practices, their present learning behaviours, their 'theory of learning', and their reflections on their learning practices. Some of the indicative questions were prepared to provide a broad framework for the areas of interest to be covered in the course of the interviews. In this study, the interview questions were designed to generate answers that aligned with the research questions and allowed them to be answered. These questions focused on students' interpretation of values which were manifested in their practices that might reveal Confucian ideas of learning. Understanding of the following aspects was sought:

- The students' explanations of observed classroom behaviours;
- The students' ideas about learning;
- Confucian ideas of learning that were reflected in students' accounts;
- Confucian ideas of learning that shape/inform/influence students' classroom behaviours and practices;
- The impact of competing ideologies on students;
- The students' deliberations on the influence of Confucian values, coupled with other competing ideologies;
- Differences between Confucian values and other ideologies;

- Different aspects of Confucian ideas of learning revealed by students;
- Other issues or questions.

It is obvious that good interviewing is about asking the right questions in the right ways. Some researchers suggest an interview guide for posing the right interview questions (Figure 3.3).

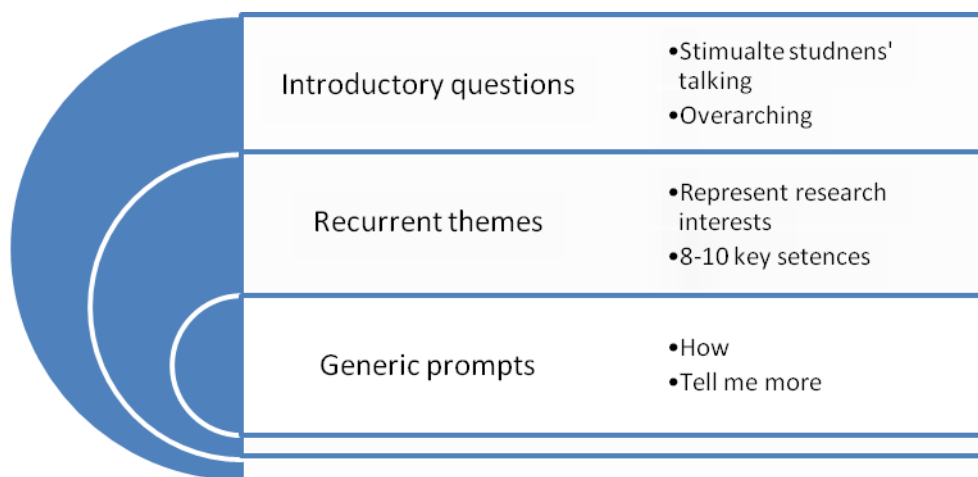


Figure 3.3: An interview guide (Tolich & Davidson, 1999)

Introductory questions were to start students' talking and needed to be interesting. A proven technique for arching this was to situate the question within the student's practices. People enjoy and usually feel relaxed, talking about themselves and their interests (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). So in this study, I posed overarching questions to encourage the students to talk about the topic. For example, the first question, "How do you see learning?" was like a blank canvas that allowed them to talk (and talk and talk) about their own learning history.

The second part of the interview guide is a list of recurrent themes that represent the project research interests. As Tolich and Davidson (1999) point out:

The second part of the one-page interview guide entails a checklist of the core theoretical and empirical issues in the study. This is a short summary, usually

consisting of eight or ten key words or sentences. These themes may be written out in question form (Pp. 112-113) - something that may be useful at first to overcome interview performance anxiety - but as you become familiar with the research problem, the themes may be a list of concepts germane to the topic. (Pp. 112-113)

Tolich and Davidson (2011) also say that the themes represent the structure of the research project on progress, and may each represent chapter and section headings for the final written project or a list of analytical categories. Most importantly, themes represent where the theoretical research interests lie for this project at this point in time. Themes are reflexive, changing continually throughout the course of data collection and strongly influenced by the analysis of the coding summaries and subsequent generated thematic files (p. 113).

Kvale (1996) offers a metaphor for interviewing: the interviewer is seen as a “miner”. This model assumes that the subject possesses specific information and that the interviewer’s job is to dig it out, to ask questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world (Babbie, 2010, p.321).

In this study, the interviews were based on my observations of students’ learning practices/behaviours and my interpretations of these observations, seeking students’ interpretations of their learning practices/behaviours and views about my interpretations. They focused more on conversation than questioning designed to enable participants to articulate insights about their behaviours and practices (Seidman, 2006) and to encourage them to develop their own ideas, feelings, insights, expectations and attitudes. Doing so allows the participants “to say what they think and to do so with greater richness and spontaneity” (Opie, 2004, p. 111).

The twelve interviews were conducted in Chinese. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed after asking the student’s permission. However, the tape recorder does not always work perfectly. One way to avoid this problem is always to assume that the tape recorder is malfunctioning and to jot down

the main points of what is being said on the interview guide (Tolich & Davidson, 1999; 2011). Note taking not only helped me create natural pauses, but also enabled me to capture non-verbal communication. In addition, these jotted notes kept me in touch with both the participant's agenda and my agenda, and allowed me to salvage the main issues raised by the students.

## **Reflecting on interviews**

Although the field interview is a "speech event" and close to a friendly conversation, it differs from a friendly conversation. In a normal conversation, each of us wants to come across as an interesting, worthwhile person. But in a qualitative interview, as an interviewer, the desire to appear interesting is counterproductive. The interviewer needs to make the other person seem interesting, by being interested—and by listening more than talking ( Babbie, 2010, p. 321). Thus, when I listened, I tried not to halt the participant's lines of discussion, but took what he or she had just said and branched that comment back in the direction appropriate to my research purposes (Babbie, 2010, p. 320). That means that I asked a question, listened carefully to the answer, interpreted its meaning for my general inquiry, and then framed another or redirected the student's attention to an area more relevant to my inquiry. As Royse (2011) says, from responses received from questions, interviewers frame new questions that may not have been planned and may actually lead to new areas of inquiry.

From the above discussion, it is obvious that the field interview is conversational, and the goal is to form a dialogue to facilitate the researcher's journey. It is a joint production of a researcher and a member. Members are active participants whose insights, feelings and cooperation are an essential part of a discussion process that reveals subject meanings while researchers are the ones who do not understand.

Therefore, in this research project, when interviewing I presented myself as someone who did not understand the situation I found myself in and had to

be helped to grasp even the most basic and obvious aspects of that situation. Doing so led me to enhanced explanations of the phenomenon I was studying.

## **Documentary analysis**

Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson (2002) argue that knowledge of the history and context surrounding a specific setting comes, in part, from reviewing documents. Documents which were analyzed in this study include those from the national Ministry of Education and the provincial Bureau of Education, relevant university policies or regulations, documents and web information relating to learning and teaching, e.g. policies, regulations, and learning and teaching plans, curricula. In addition to these, those which were referred to by participants were investigated, for example, students' thoughts about the research and reflective notes they provided voluntarily. I also analyzed my researcher-generated documents such as written notes, and my research journal of reflections and observations during the process of collection of research materials.

In this research, I familiarized myself with national and institutional documents that I thought participants might mention and followed up documents that were actually referred to by students in the interviews. I was interested in knowing whether certain documents, assumed to be significant or influential, were actual influences from the participants' perspective. Some examples of documents I needed were the Tertiary Education Regulation (1999), the Planning Outline of Mid-long Term Educational Reform and Development (2010), and the University Developmental Action Plan (2011).

The Chinese government has clearly indicated its commitment to improve the quality of education and learning, and requires tertiary educational institutions to:

ensure that students obtain the best value possible from their participation in tertiary education; ensure that what learners study is relevant to their own needs, to those of employers, communities and society, and in particular to

China's national goals; ensure that students increasingly progress to higher levels of learning and qualifications; and ensure that what students learn enables them to transmit, to innovate, to support the intellectual, economic, political and social growth of China, and to contribute to all aspects of Chinese life and socialist development.

(Tertiary Education Regulation, 1999)

The Planning Outline of Mid-long Term Educational Reform and Development (2010) states that:

Universities should contribute to the development of society, and to transmission and innovation of traditional culture through the distinctive contributions.

(Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 26-27)

The University Developmental Action Plan (2011) claims that learning should connect with international recognition, national needs and local economic development:

To emphasize the quality of teaching and learning; to ensure that cultivation of talents connects with the Central China Culture and the Central China Economic District that the university serves; to create a framework for sharing and using knowledge at the national level and in the global sphere. (p. 3)

Other documents such as learning handouts and course handbooks mentioned or referred to by students during the interviews, were also followed up and reviewed. A data file for each participant included such records as blogs, portfolios and written materials on his or her ideas about learning. Transcripts of interviews, documents and records collected, and notes taken in the process of this present study were archived in individual folders for each participant.

Documents compiled from a diversity of sources enabled me to understand students' explanations and reflections on Confucian values in their learning practices. By using these sources of information, this inquiry was contextualised, meanings were constructed, and phenomena were

interpreted, understood and theorized, to answer the research questions. Such documents gave me an understanding of the background of knowledge of the history and context surrounding the university. The critical review of documents is an unobtrusive and nonreactive method, but rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting, as well as articulating priorities of policy makers (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

## **Interview materials**

Establishing the trustworthiness of interview transcripts is regarded as a fundamental component of rigour in qualitative research (Poland, 1995). Reflection on and translation of transcriptions are also important.

## **Transcribing interview**

Different researchers make choices about whether to transcribe, what to transcribe, and how to represent the record in text. There are multiple ways of dealing with interview data. Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) recommend the full tape-transcribe-code-interpret (TTCI) cycle. The TTCI procedures are designed to facilitate assessment of narrative discourse, to document changes in narrative discourse over time, and to provide a means of quantifying this information so that it can be used for the purposes of planning and obtaining funding for special services (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p. 79). Hughes, McGillivray and Schmidek (1997) advocate using the terminal unit (T-unit) and communication unit (CU) when dealing with the issue of segmentation of transcripts. Both of them are the segmentation of transcripts, and reflect clause structure and thus syntactic complexity in written and oral samples, respectively (Hughes et al., 1997, p. 37). They index clausal structure but also note that transcripts could be segmented on the basis of propositions to track semantic development (Hughes et al., 1997).

Gravois, Rosenfield and Greenberg (1992) provide evidence that coding directly from audiotapes was sufficiently reliable for their evaluative research,

thus the transcription step may be omitted. For my interview data, I favoured the full TCI process with verbatim transcription as this way was thought to be “more complete, accurate, and unbiased”, and preserved data for analysis in a “more permanent, retrievable, examinable and flexible manner” (ibid, p. 77). I transcribed all interviews and understood that transcribing was an interpretive act (Denzin, 1995; Green, Franquiz & Dixon, 1997; Poland, 1995). I did my best to reach a reasonable match between sound file and text file.

### **Translating transcripts**

As mentioned above, all interviews in this study were conducted in Chinese. I translated the first few transcripts. However, as interviews progressed, I was unable to do it on my own due to time constraints. I asked some of the postgraduate students at the school of foreign languages to help me complete the task. These students were asked to translate transcripts directly so as to keep the original meanings of the text. Having made this decision, I also kept in mind that I could not be distanced from the process. Thus, every time I received a translation, I compared the English text with Chinese one, and was attentive to pieces eliminated that might have been important to the interactions in order to obtain a better understanding of the translation.

### **Reflecting on transcripts**

Transcripts create worlds one step removed from the real interactions researcher have with participants. As Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) say, “transcription represents an audiotaped or videotaped world, and the record itself represents an interactive event” (p. 81). So the worlds revealed by transcripts are not simply re-presentations but are textual constructions. Each step and attempt to re-present resulted in another re-creation, another “unrepeatable event in the life of the text, a new link to the historical moment that produced it” (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p.10). As a result, every re-presentation is in some ways less than the original because some understandings and possibly significant elements of conversation are lost. The

original voices, intentions of asking and telling, and interpretations cannot be recovered.

However, in another sense, each re-presentation may be more informative because of the intervention of the researcher as there is always the possibility that the researcher organises, constructs and interprets textual presentation into a new other world of creation. That is, transcripts are assembled by the researcher and mediated by the researcher's interpretive stance. As Denzin (1995) argues, "Behind the text as agent is the author of the text doing the interpreting" (p. 15). In fact, when dealing with interview transcripts, I noticed that there were other things in addition to what was inside the text, that I could see and sense at the time of interviews being conducted, e.g. what was said seemed ambiguous. Sometimes I felt that I was not reading the words in the transcripts, but reading within and beyond the words themselves. So in the analytical interpretive process, I acknowledged that there was a certain subjectivity involved in reading data, as presented in the following chapter.

## **The analysis of the research materials**

This qualitative research yielded meaningful and useful results, and so it was imperative to analyse the material under scrutiny. The aim with the analysis was to find out how participants saw, explained and made sense of the observed learning behaviours and practices. I looked for evidence of the existence of Confucian ideas of learning in participants' accounts.

### **An analytic stance**

Hermeneutic interpretivism guided the analysis of the research materials, i.e. interpretation of text. As mentioned in above, the hermeneutic interpretivism assumes that texts are "means of transmitting meaning – experience, beliefs, values – from one person or community to another"; it grounds the meaning of texts as "the intentions and histories of authors, the relationship between author and interpreter, or the particular relevance of texts for readers"

(Crotty, 1998, p. 91). In order to understand the transcripts (texts) of participants' accounts, I was to "move dialectically between part and whole, in the mode of the hermeneutic circle" (ibid, p. 92). With this perspective, I recognized that the analysis of the research materials was a communicative activity, a complex practice and an ongoing process.

### **A communicative activity**

Indeed, the analysis of research materials was a relationship between me as a researcher, a set of research materials being collected, and the phenomena under investigation, rather than a discrete set of decontextualized individual skills or techniques. It was about meaning making and learning to produce knowledge in particular communities. As Malfroy and Yates (2003) argue, the process of meaning making of and from data in doctoral research is "an enterprise of the group, not just of an individual" (p. 128).

In my research, a group of people were involved in this process: participants, peers, supervisors and the research community. Participant offered their valuable practices and explanations as primary research materials for this research. They not only reviewed interview transcripts, quotes I selected and profiles I crafted, but also provided me with constructive feedback on my preliminary research results at the early stage of the analysis of research materials.

Friends, colleagues or a group of doctoral students met formally and informally to share our research journeys. They offered valuable insights to this research. I thus had opportunities to access alternative perspectives on my research topic. I shared my interpretations of research materials at the meetings. I invited colleagues and other PhD students as readers to mark whatever caught their attention. Participation in this kind of research activity broadened my understanding of research methods, expanded my thinking of theories and developed my skills of interpreting practice.

My supervisors gave me valuable instructions during the long journey of learning. They suggested that I should write monthly reports when I was in

China. These reports formed the basis of the literature review, methodology and the analysis of research materials. The meetings and emails with my supervisors were occasions to seek guidance and to gain alternative perspectives. After communicating with my supervisors, the presentation and discussion of research results was immediately clear. When Part 1 was finished, I emailed it to my supervisors and it became the basis of communication with my supervisors prior to commencing the process with the next two parts of the presentation and discussion. After I discussed with my supervisors, each part of the presentation and discussion was immediately rewritten for a better representation of the participants' behaviours and accounts. These meetings, discussions and emails enhanced the quality of case presentation, challenged my interpretations of research materials, developed my subjective understandings of participants' explanations and corrected any bias or taken-for-granted values, which were present in my culture.

The contributions of my publications and participation in the wider research community were also significant for this research (Song, 2010, 2012, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2013, 2013a, 2013b). Scholars and colleagues provided me with insights and constructive feedback about my literature review, research design, results and discussion, as well as publications. Through communication, I came to see the analysis of research materials as a social, interactive and communicative practice rather than a discrete set of decontextualized individual skills or techniques. I realized that it was a process of meaning-making and learning to produce knowledge in particular communities. During this process, I recognised my limitations and identified blind spots, and I also came to acknowledge that the complexity of the analysis of research materials was inevitable.

### **A complex practice**

Through the communication and interaction between me, research materials, participants, peers, supervisors and research communities, I frequently changed my views of the nature of research and the phenomena under

investigation. I constantly felt that I needed to reflect on and to reconsider the assumption of relationships, which could be established between Confucian ideas of learning and students' classroom behaviours and their explanations of learning. I then came to realize that interpreting the research materials is not a simple or linear process, but a non-linear, dynamic, emergent and complex system (Morrison, 2008; Davis & Sumara, 2005; Cherry, 2005; Heylighen, Cilliers & Gershenson, 2008; Lemke & Sabelli, 2008; Kuhn, 2008; Desai, 2010; Mitleton-Kelly, 2011; Espinosa & Porter, 2011), because "there is not a linear relationship between cause and effect" (Human & Cilliers, 2013, p. 25). As Davis and Sumara (2005) suggest, "Linear relations and correlations, linear trajectories, linear report formats and linear narratives make for very poor representations of complex phenomena" (p. 313). This means that a variety of systems operate simultaneously in particular phenomena and they are nested in each other; definite boundaries are unlikely to be identified, and complete understanding of one isolated system without reference to others is therefore impossible. Complex systems contain a number of interacting elements that are subject to change over time. Each element's future action may be modified accordingly to adapt to evolved/evolving changes. Interactions between elements lead to the emergence of unpredictable phenomena. As Urry (2005) says, "everything is connected to everything else" (p. 3). Complex systems show behaviours that result from the interactions between components, which specifically include the spontaneous emergence of new forms of order at critical points of instability. Relationships between variables in the components can be non-linear with unexpected switches occurring.

In this study, in the course of interpretation of the research materials, none of the particular students' behaviours and accounts of learning represents a stable contributing or decisive factor. A small piece of the account of one student might lead to important results. Likewise within one case, an initial happening which the student was less aware of at the time might be recalled and have significant impact at a later stage. On the other hand, an essential

component in one student's account might have less meaning in another's. However, the complex process of presenting and discussing the research results also stresses the emergence of 'order out of chaos' and the sustained behaviour of complex systems 'at the edge of chaos' (Cohen & Stewart, 1994, as cited in Hodgson, 2000, p. 71), instead of focusing largely on disorder and chaos. That is, systems are not complete 'anarchic randomness' but there is an 'orderly disorder' present (Urry, 2005, p. 8) although unpredictability is acknowledged. For example, while emphasizing the nature of strong interactions occurring between the parts of systems, Urry (2005) also recognises the frequent absence of a central hierarchical structure that 'governs' and produces outcomes. An overall pattern that may persist can be discerned through engaged investigation and insightful delineation. In this sense, to a certain extent, knowing any system, is possible.

In this study, when presenting a rich set of research materials, although I acknowledged that my knowledge of any complex phenomena was limited, and I could not make complete, absolute or final claims about complex systems (Cillers, 2005), I simplified a highly complex system by choosing a few relevant variables and then investigated within and between them (Nowotny, 2005; Capra, 2005; Hodgson, 2000). For example, I chose the first observation, 'a workshop', to write down a concrete recording of the particular words, phrases and actions with the aim of explaining its importance. But from the perspective of a complex system, this decision did not mean that others were not equally important although some aspects were inevitably left out of consideration. The parts which were left out might interact with the rest of the system in a non-linear way and I could therefore not predict what the effects might be. As Mezirow (1997) describes:

...transforming one's own frame of reference, often occurs in response to a disorienting dilemma through a three part process: critical reflection on one's assumptions, discourse to validate the critically reflective insight, and action. (p. 60)

In the process of the analysis of research materials, I realized that a personal transformation involves subjective reframing, and came to constantly reflect on the assumptions I was holding and to reframe reference of myself.

### **An ongoing process**

Although the analysis of research materials was a communicative and complex practice, I also acknowledged that it was an individual and ongoing process. Rapley (2007) says that data analysis is always an ongoing process that started prior to the first interview. As claimed in Chapter 1, I commenced this study with my interest in Confucian ideas of learning. I then began to gather literature in this area. These readings were informative and stimulated my thinking. My discussions and interactions with supervisors, lecturers, friends and colleagues, as well as my reflections on the literature provided me with an initial focus on Confucian values in university students' learning.

During the course of a year's preparation for candidature proposal, the research focus was further refined. My interest, readings, writing and research proposal offered me initial ideas about observations, possible participants, interview questions and analytic themes. I then started classroom observations. I chose those specific participants based on my preliminary analysis of the observations. Before I carried out the interviews, I had already made some specific analytic choices about what type of students might be selected, and what kinds of topics might be discussed with each particular student.

Before observations, I needed to think of which kinds of classes should be selected. While observing, I took jotted notes; after observation, I immediately finished the direct notes, inference notes, analytic notes and personal notes. Conducting interviews involved a process of re-analysing previous observation data while receiving and constructing new data. Subsequent reflection was another unit of analysis. During the interviews, I took notes on my observations about the interview process and possible improvements to questions being asked and other skills. I then revisited the

trajectory of my research and considered forthcoming interviews and other new ideas.

As I mentioned before, listening to recordings, and reading transcripts or translations were major parts of analysis. After an interview, I repeatedly listened to the recordings until I had a vivid mental picture of that participant. I did all the transcripts and always checked transcripts and translations against the recordings, and listened again to the recordings while re-reading the transcripts and translations. This enabled me not only to focus on what was said, but how it was said, and to understand the context of the interview more systematically.

The immersion in research materials led to coding and re-coding, and writing and re-writing. Writing is a process of data analysis and turns into a successive process of rewriting which is characterised by re-thinking and reflecting (Richardson, 2002). Writing taught me what I knew, and in what ways I knew what I knew. I became thoughtful by seeing myself mirrored in the text. With textual reflection, structure and restructure of ideas, I gained sufficient opportunities to rethink the nature of my research, to reinterpret the research materials, to re-explore the essence of students' behaviours and explanations and to identify the multiplicity of their interrelations. In this research, writing mediated my reflection, mended my thought on paper, externalised what in some sense was internal, and created "the reflective cognitive stance that generally characterises the theoretic attitude in social sciences" (van Manen, 1997, pp. 124-125).

Through this process of thinking and rethinking, and writing and rewriting, multiple layers of meaning were constructed and came to the foreground though vagueness and uncertainty remained. Thus, from the initial interest in the topic, through collecting and interpreting research materials, to the final textual product, I felt that ongoing reflection and continual analysis plays a significant role during the long journey of doctorate research.

## **A constant comparative method**

Along with the analytic stance, a method of “constant comparison” (Glaser & Strauss, 1999) was adopted for the analysis of research materials in this study. After all the research materials were collected, I coded them. I moved back and forth between the research materials and the emergent categories of meaning to arrange observation notes and interview transcripts. I organized the raw research materials into conceptual categories and created themes or concepts. As Neuman (2000) states:

Instead of a simple clerical task, qualitative coding is an integral part of data analysis. It is guided by the research question and leads to new questions. It frees a researcher from entanglement in the details of the raw data and encourages higher level thinking about them. It also moves him or her toward theory and generalization. (p.420)

Strauss (1987) defines three kinds of qualitative data coding: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (cited in Neuman, 2000).

### **Open coding**

This was performed in the beginning of the analysis of research materials. Neuman (2000) says that “The researcher locates themes and assigns initial codes or labels in a first attempt to condense the mass of data into categories” (p. 421). During open coding, researchers do not lay perceived thought on data, which might force or distort the meaning of the perspective of participants, but generate most coding themes while reading data notes (Neuman, 2000). In this research, research materials were read slowly and analysed line by line to ensure that each sentence was coded. The research materials collected from each of the participants were processed separately and analysed for their ‘units of meaning’. Then the units of meaning were returned to the participant for validation so they could see that their thoughts and words had not been misunderstood. Once an idea was coded, I then repeatedly compared it to other coded events to see whether they belonged

together in a temporary category. As the analysis proceeded, codes emerged, links became clear and familiarities grew along the way. Open coding came to an end when it yielded a core category. Through this process, abstract meaning was taken directly from the concrete research materials to the open-coded incidents, pertaining to the initial discovery of categories.

### **Axial coding**

In this step, the categories resulting from the open coding analysis began to cluster into broader conceptual groups. Strauss and Corbin (1997) state that the meaning was abstracted once again from those coded incidents into broader conceptual categories. In axial coding, I focused on the initial coded concepts, tried an organized set of initial codes and preliminary concepts, and moved toward organizing ideas in order to identify the axis of key concepts in analysis. In this step, I realized that individual held multiple and conflicting views/thoughts simultaneously and used them selectively, depending on circumstances. So my attention was shifted from the individual transcripts to the pool of statements and the meanings embedded within those statements, regardless of whether different meanings originated from the same individual or not.

### **Selective coding**

This was the third step of the analysis of research materials, aiming to find linkages among broad conceptual categories. This is also called thematic coding, referring to the underlying message of these categories as 'themes' (Harry, Sturges & Klingner, 2005). In the process, I scanned the research materials and the previous codes, looked selectively for cases that illustrated themes, made comparison and contrasts, and searched for the interrelationships between themes that theory was constructed on. In this step, the theoretical premise becomes a recursive "search for consistency and logic" (Strauss & Corbin, 1997, p. 156), and integrates key "research strands

including those that complement and those that compete for meaning” (Hunt, 2006, p. 66).

With this constant comparative method, the full process of the analysis of research materials was completed and this led to the development of theoretical explanations of phenomena occurring in this study. The following figure (Figure 3.4) summarizes the basic steps, beginning from the moment of coding the field notes and transcripts.

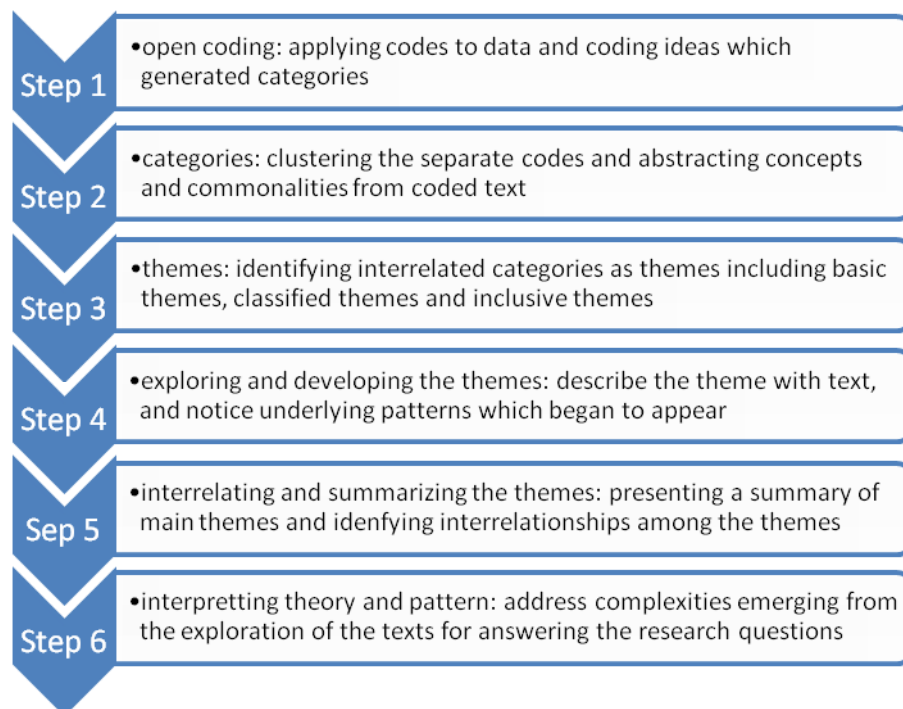


Figure 3.4: Basic steps of coding

## **A reflective and intercultural perspective**

While the practice of education is ‘value-laden’ and ‘a contested concept: different individuals and groups conceptualise it in different ways’ (Scott, 1996, p. 155), it is problematic for researchers who are themselves products of an educational tradition to take a value-neutral or value-free position when looking into culturally embedded educational practices. Usher’s (1996) notion of double hermeneutic offers a useful explanation:

Research involves interpreting the actions of those who are themselves interpreters: it involves interpretations of interpretations – the double hermeneutic at work. Understanding an object (other people) is always

‘prejudiced’ in the sense that it can only be approached through an initial projection of meaning. This initial projection is from the subject’s (the researcher’s) situatedness, from the subject’s standpoint in history, society and culture. (pp. 20–21)

A reflexive and culturally sensitive approach was adopted in this project. It enabled me as a researcher to be aware of the development of my professional position and views, and subsequently to be sensitive to issues in the research context. My own intercultural experiences and complementary perspectives were a feature of research approaches in this study. My linguistic, education and work background which spans both cultures (Chinese and western) enabled me to take an external perspective on myself (Byran, 2003). Thus, the process of investigation itself involved interaction, negotiation and reflection (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006).

## **Considerations of academic rigour**

In this study, I always kept in mind that my research needed to be trustworthy and to have rigour. I tried my best to engage in conversation with participants, colleagues, supervisors, academics and the wider community. The transparent presentation of the research process and multiple sources of research materials ensured the quality of this research.

The process of triangulation was carried out to gain a greater understanding (Mutch, 2007). Triangulation is described as confirmation that is commonly sought through multiple methods of investigation so that different sources of information provide support for the findings and observed relationships (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In this project, in order to produce a more thorough and rigorous piece of research, research methods such as observation, interview and documentary analysis were used in conjunction with one another for the collection of research materials. Triangulation of observations, interviews and document analysis can provide a more complete and accurate account than any one component could alone (Maxwell, 2005). As Patton (2002) argues, “the documentation would not have made sense

without the interviews, and the focus of the interviews came from the field observations” (p. 307). In this study, what was observed could be related to the accounts and explanations offered by participants in interviews, while documentary analysis provided background information. Considering different viewpoints and obtaining research materials from several sources provided a better understanding.

The research process was integrative and reflexive (Koch & Harrington, 1998). A reflective journal was used to record what I did and thought such as my observations and reflections on the research process (Moore & Kuol, 2007; Cho & Trent, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Lobo & Vizcaino, 2006). The construction of the text and arguments reflected my values, histories and interests (Crotty, 1998). When the decisions of the researcher are explicitly stated, the transparency of the process is achieved; the auditability of the research is raised (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Finlay, 2002).

## **Ethical considerations**

This research project was carried out in accordance with the ethical principles set out by the AUT University Ethics Committee (AUTEK), which reviewed and approved my ethics application, Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 1 & 4) and Consent Form (Appendix 2, 3 5 & 6). “Information Privacy Principles”, the rules of “Respect for Rights of Privacy and Confidentiality” and other relevant guidelines on the AUT university website about ethics (see [www.aut.ac.nz](http://www.aut.ac.nz)) were followed.

The ethical standards such as confidentiality, informed consent and anonymity were fundamental for this research. These standards were intertwined with research practice during the process. Each decision and act including gaining access to classrooms observed, identifying the participants, the analysis of research materials, writing up the thesis and participants’ engagement in the research process was measured against ethical standards.

In the study, participation was voluntary. The participants were fully informed as to the nature of the study and commitments required for participation. They were free to withdraw at any time or to participate in ways they felt comfortable with. Participants were also given the opportunity to review full transcripts so as to make changes and comments and were further invited to review the quotes used in Chapters 4 or 5 related to their own accounts. Pseudonyms were used when referring to participants. No one had access to the original voice research materials, and no one other than my supervisors and several postgraduate students who helped me with the translation, had access to full interview transcripts.

I also realized that particular study had particular issues. I had worked at this university for many years. I was not able to distance myself from the research setting and to detach myself emotionally from the research context. So, besides following these general ethical principles, particular attention was paid to the specific ethical requirements created by undertaking research within the university where I was working. In this research context, I conceived the notion of ethics as a process of transformation of my relationships with participants. I was aware that ethical consideration for me was more than a superficial clarification of my project achieved through the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form; it was the conceptualising of research as social practice and mutual activity which had personal consequences other than a thesis as the end product. As Costley and Gibbs (2006) point out, research “involves a ‘real-world’ consideration of our interaction with others, and an examination of the context of the research which informs and constructs the social realities of the situation” (p. 96).

## **Research materials and results**

The gradual building of a picture for each participating student through gathering research materials from various sources culminated in the development of two broad themes: emergent Confucian ideas and students’ deliberation. The total quantity of research materials gathered presented a

considerable problem for the process of analysis. The initial identification of details brought more complexities into play, and the range of research materials and interpretive commentary made its presentation challenging. Although theoretically it was possible to engage in a highly systematic procedure with each case for an in-depth understanding, in reality I encountered too many practical problems, particularly in the amount of time involved. It soon became apparent that the time required for a more fine-grained analysis, further interpretation, and the preparation of a doctoral thesis, would be considerably longer than had been originally estimated.

Although the timeframe for a doctoral research hindered a more comprehensive presentation of description, analysis and interpretation of research materials, I did not intend to compromise breadth and depth, and so I adopted a selective approach to the presentation of cases. My selection was made with the following criteria: a) the extent to which the particular case answered the research questions; and b) the extent to which its characteristics had been widely shared by all participants.

Based on these criteria, I presented and discussed research results in Chapter 4, and divided the research materials into three parts: Part 1 – Emergent Confucian ideas, Part 2 – Students' deliberations, Part 3 – Students' identity and agency.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I examined some theoretical perspectives including constructivism and hermeneutics, and considered that reality is socially constructed and subjectively determined (Crotty, 1998) and that courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of agents who subjectively determine their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances (Archer, 2003a). Then I used relevant methods including observation, interview and document analysis to explore how those constructions occur; how structural emergent properties impinge upon

students and condition their learning as well as how these properties are received and responded to by students in turn; how participants understand the reasons governing why or how they made choices about their learning actions (Stake, 1995); how students, as functioning human beings, place meanings on the events, processes and structures of their lives (Creswell, 2007), in particular, on the Confucian ideas of learning; and how intended and unintended consequences produced by students' interactions lead to structural and cultural elaboration, reproduction or transformation (Archer, 2003a).

## Chapter 4 Emergent Confucian ideas, students' deliberations and identity

The Master said, "The *Junzi* agrees with others without being an echo (子曰: 君子和而不同)". (Book 13:23, the *Analects*, 2008)

### Introduction

The research results offered evidence of the influence of Confucian values in the practices of students. Some similarities were obvious in students' behaviours and accounts, including Confucian ideas of learning identified in students' descriptions, students' interactions with Confucian and other ideologies and the conflicts, dilemmas and uncertainties they sometimes experienced in their learning practices. There were also other patterns apparent in students' explanations as shown in this chapter.

It was clear from evidence provided that the nature of university students' learning in contemporary China was related to certain Confucian ideas. As stated in Chapter 2, voluminous research highlights the prevalence of one or a set of Confucian ideas/thoughts in various contexts. These studies have yielded different or even contrasting results. While some studies focus on influences of Confucianism on students' learning (Shi, 2006; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Pratt, 1992), few of them do so in relation to the possible influence of Confucian values on Chinese university students' classroom behaviours and practices. Consequently, addressing one or a set of Confucian ideas of learning is necessary; however, this is insufficient in itself to realize the whole picture. This research, therefore, was to adopt a comprehensive approach, intending to identify the influence in students' learning practices and their accounts, as well as taking into account the impact of a changing society on Chinese students' learning, as immense social changes have recently been taking place in China. Although I was not tracking the influence longitudinally, I invited students to reflect on the influence. I also sought insights into

students' inner world and their processing of the influence, and their subsequent explanations of and deliberations on it.

So in the first part I present the research materials and discuss how students explained Confucian ideas of learning identified in their classroom behaviours and accounts, with more attention being given to structural or cultural influences. In the second part I present the research materials and examine how students weighed up or deliberated on the influence of Confucian ideas of learning and other competing ideologies in the actual context, with more attention being given to agential projects. In the third part, I summarize the influence of Confucian ideas of learning from the perspective of human agency and structure (Archer 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2007), and reach an understanding of the relationship between students' selves and the influence.

## **Part 1: Emergent Confucian ideas**

In this part, I organize the research results in terms of part of the main research question, the four specific sub-questions and one of assumptions posed in Chapter 1.

Part of the main research question is:

To what extent can students' classroom behaviours and practices be explained or understood in terms of Confucian ideas of learning?

The four specific sub-questions are:

- How do students make explanations for their observed classroom behaviours and learning practices?
- How might these students' explanations, descriptions and accounts reflect Confucian ideas of learning?
- How do students describe or explain different aspects of Confucian ideas in terms of their learning practices?
- How do these Confucian ideas of learning shape/inform/influence students' classroom behaviours and practices?

One assumption is:

- Students' accounts may reveal different aspects of Confucian ideas of learning, which may or may not support their learning.

In this empirical research it was found that Confucian ideas of learning spilled over into students' practices, and were ongoing alongside their learning in this empirical research. Five key themes which explicitly related to Confucian ideas of learning emerged from the research materials including interviews and observations. Examples related to all these factors are presented to provide a snapshot of the entirety of these ideas of learning emerging from the research materials. Again, these were described most commonly as inextricably linked rather than as distinct themes, although I present them as the latter to assist describing.

- Consideration for others and the reciprocity of learning (恕);
- Social responsibilities of learning (任重而道远);
- Becoming a good student (君子);
- Pleasure of learning (学而时习之，不亦说乎);
- Questioning learning (每事问)

In what follows, for each theme, I first describe Confucian ideas of learning, and provide evidence from the *Analects*. Second, I describe what the theme represented and present the relevant examples of observations and interviews. Third, I discuss the implications of the research results and explain the results of the research question and any additional points, in reference to possible explanations of the results and their convergence with or divergence from previous literature and relevance to theories.

### **Consideration for others and the reciprocity of learning (恕)**

In the *Analects*, Confucius says that there is one single thread binding his way together. That is reciprocity (*Shu*, 恕), which means that while we do not wish others to impose on us, we do not wish to impose on others either. For example,

Zi-gong asked, “Is there a single word which can be a guide to conduct through one’s life?” The Master said, “It is perhaps the word ‘*shu*’. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire (子贡问曰：有一言而可以终身行之者乎？子曰：其恕乎！己所不欲，勿施于人)”. (Book 15:24)

Confucius here suggests that one should use him/herself as a measure to gauge the likes and dislikes of others, and should treat others with consideration.

In this study, as observed in the classrooms, there was little interaction between the lecturers and students, and students asked questions after class. Also, during interviewing, when they were asked why they were quiet in classrooms, most students claimed that being quiet in classrooms was to consider the interests of others including teachers and classmates (see Figure 4.1).

| Students | Reasons   |
|----------|---|
| S1       | Do not want to disturb lecturers                                      |
| S2       | Do not want to disturb lecturers                                      |
| S3       | Give consideration to other classmates and have respect for lecturers |
| S4       | Respect for lecturers and comply with classroom rules                 |
| S5       | Do not want to waste the time of other classmates                     |
| S6       | Personal character  |
| S7       | Respect for lecturers and do not want to speak out in public          |
| S8       | Give consideration to others and shy of speaking out in public        |
| S9       | Respect for lecturers   |
| S10      | Show respect to lecturers   |
| S11      | Give consideration to other classmates and obey classroom rules       |
| S12      | Personal character and obey classroom rules                           |

Figure 4.1: The reasons for being quiet in classrooms

S10, S9, S7, S1, S2 said that they did not want to disturb the process of lecturing. They felt that Chinese people respected teachers and valued their teaching. Sometimes, if a student puts forward something in class, it seems that he/she does not respect the teacher. Some students thought that when the teacher was speaking, posing questions might affect the teacher’s plan and the students’ process of gaining knowledge. As S1 said:

Usually, I don't ask questions during lecturing because I would consider the continuity of the lectures. I think a lecturer has plans. I don't want to interrupt him, unless...everyone has the same doubt. ... If I ask questions, it might affect the lecturer's teaching plan, and then the lecturer might not finish the teaching task. ... I think it's better to ask questions after class. No matter how the teacher teaches, it would be better to listen to the whole lecture. (S1)

S11, S8, S3, S5 tended to emphasize that they did not want to waste the learning time of other classmates. They said that the lecture was scheduled to be a certain length and time for questions was not allowed. If a certain question was discussed, the time of other classmates would be wasted. So the students chose to ask the teacher after class. As S3 said:

If I ask a question in the class, and sometimes the question is very complex, it would waste other students' time of learning, and the process of teaching would be stopped. So questions should be asked after class. (S3)

These views appeared to resonate with Confucius' ideas stated above and indicated that inner standards which were used to choose the correct behaviours in the classrooms required consideration for others and moral-based decision-making. These standards included respectful learning, a modest attitude to learning and learning from others.

### **Respectful learning**

Confucius expects learners to respect rules and to obey social orders, and informs his disciples that in governing, if the subject follows the ruler, and the son follows the father, then the state will be stable, the family will be in harmony, and the people will have grain to eat. For example,

Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about governance. Confucius answered, "Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son (齐景公问政于孔子。孔子对曰：君君，臣臣，父父，子子)".

The Duke said, "Splendid! Truly, if the ruler be not a ruler, the subject not a subject, the father not a father, the son not a son, then even if there be grain,

would I get to eat it? (公曰: 善哉! 信如君不君, 臣不臣, 父不父, 子不子, 虽有粟, 吾得而食诸? )". (Book 12:11)

In Figure 4.1, most of the participants appeared to be in accordance with what Confucius said above, and claimed that they had to comply with the classroom rules. They thought that if everybody in classrooms asks their own questions, the classroom would be disorderly and the teacher would not be a teacher. So participants claimed that students need to follow the teacher, and then they will be able to obtain knowledge from the teacher. As S4 said:

If everyone asked questions during lecturing, the classroom would be disorderly, and the lecturer would not be a lecturer. We can ask questions after class. We are always told to listen to the teacher carefully, not to talk in the classroom. (S4)

Confucius also expects his disciples to honour those higher than themselves, and emphasizes the importance of role models in learning. For Confucius, knowledge is learned mainly from the ancients whom the collective recognizes as greater exemplars. He encourages young people to respect their elders and even regards the elders as "the pole star" (Polaris or the North Star). For example,

The Master said, "The rule of virtue can be compared to the Pole Star which commands the homage of the multitude of stars simply by remaining in its place (子曰: 为政以德, 譬如北辰居其所而众星共之)." (Book 2:1)

The students interviewed and observed in the current project resonated with this idea. The majority of the participants regarded their elders, in particular their parents, as role models of learning, and always paid reverence to them. These students thought that their parents' endurance and persistence had influenced their personal growth and inspired their learning. As S5 said:

My father has influenced me greatly. He got a diploma and became a teacher after the Great Culture Revolution. But afterwards, a bachelor's degree was needed if you wanted to be a teacher, so he needed further study. At that time, my family lived in a noisy factory and it was quite hot in the middle of summer.

My father found a place to begin extensive reading, and didn't come back home for several months. My mother sometimes sent him something to eat. I was impressed by my father's persistence, which still influences me today. I can learn quietly no matter how noisy the surroundings are. I feel that he sets an example for me. (S5)

Students thought that their parents' experiences were richer than theirs, so they followed their parents' suggestions when they chose their current subjects. S4, S6, S8, S9 and S12 claimed that they knew little about university subjects when they graduated from high school. They said that they sometimes had their own opinions, but they would respect their parents' opinions rather than doing things on their own initiatives if parents were insistent. As S4 said:

My current subject was chosen with my mother's help because I knew nothing about university at that time. I remember I did a test to see what university subjects suited me when I was in senior high school. It turned out to seem like engineering management. ... At that time, senior high school students ... were busy with examinations each day and didn't know what these subjects were useful for. My mother said that choosing architecture ... would be easy to find a job, and I said OK, that's it. I always respected my parents' suggestions. (S4)

S2 and S1 conveyed this message: their parents were ordinary peasants, had limited literary knowledge, and did not know too much about learning, but what parents gave them was the spiritual support and the warmest harbour. So they still regarded their parents as role models and felt warm whenever thinking of them. As S2 said:

The first point is that my parents are my power and they encourage me to learn. The second is that they are my backup. ... To be specific, on the first point, my parents are getting older and older. ... I feel that I have the responsibility to study hard and to reward them. On the second one, when encountering difficulties in daily lives, my parents are just like a harbour which can help me escape from a storm and get some comfort and encouragement. So they have a great influence on my study. My parents think that I put too much pressure on myself. They always worry that I am too pressured and want to help me reduce the pressures. I come from the countryside and am the oldest child in my family.

I have many brothers and sisters, who pin their hopes on me. The pressure is not only from my parents and grandparents, but also from my aunts and uncles. (S2)

In addition, Confucius thinks that respectful learning, in particular, respecting elders, is filiality (*Xiao* 孝). He regards filial piety (*Xiaoshun* 孝顺) as a foundational relationship in the Chinese family and society. The master argues that we can know the moral character of a person by knowing how well he/she treats (*Xiao* 孝) his/her family, in particular, parents. In Confucius' opinion, when serving father and mother, providing parents with food is not enough. More importantly, we should remain reverent even if our advice is ignored; we should not become disobedient, and should not complain even if we are distressed. For example,

Zi-you asked about being filial. The Master said, "Nowadays for a man to be filial means no more than that he is able to provide his parents with food. Even hounds and horses are, in some way, provided with food. If a man shows no reverence, where is the difference? (子游问孝。子曰：今之孝者，是谓能养。至于犬马，皆能有养；不敬，何以别乎？)" (Book 2:7)

In this research, all students were in accordance with this cultural belief, and tended to exhibit this very traditional Chinese trait. They thought that one would be showing filial piety if respecting their parents; they also thought that their parents were their initial teachers and had influence on their decisions from primary school through high school and university, including etiquette, daily life, communication and treatment of other people. So when communicating with their parents, students always showed respect to their parent's opinions although they occasionally pointed out what was inappropriate in a way that parents could accept. Some students claimed that they had always warned themselves not to do anything unreasonable, which would make parents sad, as their parents gave them a lot of care. As S8 said:

I think that filial piety is priority. I feel that for parents and grandparents, their lives are not easy. They give us so much more care, and we cannot repay them no matter how much we do for them. Like the poem we recite in our childhood,

‘the thread in the hands of a loving mother (慈母手中线)’. I have been able to recite it since I was a child but I didn’t realize the meaning at that time. Especially in recent years, my parents are getting older, and I can feel that kind of emotion which is like the poem-‘knitting all affection into every stitch before children go on a journey (临行密密缝)’. (S8)

### **A modest attitude to learning**

In Chinese history, Confucius is famous for his view on humility. He is a capable man and has many talents, but he is able to ask the advice of those who are not capable and those who have few talents (以能问于不能，以多问于寡) (Book 8:5). So humility or modesty has always played a key role in the *Analects*. For Confucius, humility manifests itself in daily life. Learners need to regulate their own behaviours, that is, being moderate with speech and acting cautiously with moderation. For example,

Zi-qin asked Zi-gong, “When the Master arrives in a state, he invariably gets to know about its government. Does he seek this information? Or is it given him? (子禽问于子贡曰：夫子至于是邦也，必闻其政，求之与？抑与之与？)”

Zi-gong said, “The Master gets it through being cordial, well-behaved, respectful, frugal and deferential. The way the Master seeks it is, perhaps, different from the way other men seek it (子贡曰：夫子温、良、恭、俭、让以得之。夫子之求之也，其诸异乎人之求之与？)”. (Book 1:10)

In this study, participants were in accordance with the learning principle in the *Analects*, and tended to think that modesty was essential in learning. As observed in the third learning activity, which was organized by students, some students seemed to enjoy discussing the movie *Forrest Gump*, and sharing their opinions with others. They thought that we should learn knowledge from others as it was impossible for each of us to know everything. The more we learn, the more we realise that we are ignorant. More importantly, in interviews, the majority of the students knew that this modest attitude of learning originated from Confucius. They gave some examples of Confucius’ well-known proverbs such as “He was quick and eager to learn: he was not

ashamed to seek the advice of those who were beneath him in station (敏而好学, 不耻下问)” (Book 5:15) and “Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them (三人行必有我师)” (Book 7:22). The following three extracts are chosen to illustrate this learning principle:

I learned in the *Analects of Confucius* that “he was not ashamed to seek the advice of those who were beneath him in station (不耻下问)” and “Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them (三人行必有我师)”. Anyway, we should learn from anyone who is better than us. ...That means modesty is a learning attitude. We should know that knowledge is endless. ...So we should keep a modest attitude, and not think we no longer need to learn when we achieve good results. (S3)

We should know our shortcomings when we are learning, and be willing to listen to others’ advice. If we are complacent, we will only see our advantages and can’t see our disadvantages. ... So if we are modest, we will see others’ advantages and our disadvantages. That is, if we use others’ strength to make up our own shortcomings, it might make us improve ourselves. For example, Confucius says that “Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them (三人行必有我师)”, which shows the good attitude of modesty. He means that everyone has his or her strengths. When we see others’ strengths, we can make progress. (S7)

I think it’s related to the philosophy of our Chinese people. ...For example, “Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them (三人行必有我师)”. ... Sages are indeed sages. They can summarize a large number of words with only a few words. Sages are really good at reflection. Like some of Confucius’ sayings, learning without thinking is bewildered and thinking without learning is imperilled (学而不思则罔, 思而不学则殆). Actually, I like reflecting on my daily life to see whether I am wrong and why I am not right. I have developed this habit since I was a little child. (S8)

### **Learning from others**

Modesty leads to learning from others. In Confucius’ opinion, when we see someone who is worthy, we should concentrate upon becoming their equal;

when we see someone who is unworthy, use this as an opportunity to look within ourselves. For example,

The Master said, “When you meet someone better than yourself, turn your thoughts to become his equal. When you meet someone not as good as you are, look within and examine your own self (子曰：见贤思齐焉，见不贤而内自省也)”. (Book 4:17)

The Master said, “Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them. The good points of the one I copy; the bad points of the other I correct in myself (子曰：三人行，必有我师焉：择其善者而从之，其不善者而改之)”. (Book 7:22)

In this current study, participants resonated with these ideas, and tended to think that learning from others was essential for their personal growth. They believed that people around us always had some merits, which might help us deal with relationships in our daily lives and make us gain new experiences. As S1 said:

I approve of learning from others, especially from someone who has more experience than me or is better than me in some aspects. There’s a saying that “Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them (三人行必有我师)”. ...No matter what kind of people we meet, they always have some merits we can learn from. These merits would help us deal with relationships in our daily lives. So I would like to communicate with my classmates, or friends who have more experiences than me, and then I could always gain some new things. (S1)

Furthermore, as postgraduate students, participants thought that learning from others was important for their academic development. They said that discussing with classmates was valuable for their research. Students felt that when they focused on their research topics, they sometimes were unable to identify the flaws in their own work; that if they asked their classmates for help and took others as references, they might find out their own shortcomings. As S3 said:

I have learned many theories of translation, but sometimes I feel I haven't fully understood them. If I don't know whether I am interpreting a theory correctly, then I communicate with my classmates, tell them my opinions about this theory, and ask about their opinions. If I feel their opinions are correct, I will think about their opinions again. Now, I am in grade two and preparing for the proposal of my dissertation, and I often communicate with my classmates in the dormitory, and ask their opinions about the topic I have chosen. (S3)

In addition, two students from the school of medicine claimed that learning from others could increase their practical experience. They said that they often discussed clinical cases with classmates or roommates, and shared experiences of how to communicate with patients. As S7 and S9 said:

For example, in our dormitory, we all study medicine but we don't study the same subjects. When we come back to our dormitory, we often discuss about what kind of patients and cases we have met, how we treat the patients, how they respond to our treatment, and whether they become better or worse. ... We have a discussion every day and get to know some new cases. (S7)

I am new to this department. I always ask people around me when I have questions. For example, I saw some vomiting patients. I thought I could cure them by injecting metoclopramide. But after I communicated with other colleagues, I found out that metoclopramide can't be given to patients who have breast cancer. It's better to communicate with the people around you and to learn together, which can help us remember things clearly. (S9)

The research materials presented above show that participants' explanations for being quiet in classrooms implied that Chinese students tended to consider others' feelings. It appeared that considering others and respecting others was of substantial concern when students talked of their practices and behaviours in the current context. Participants explained their cultural beliefs in choosing classroom behaviours, and the consistency among their explanations has been striking. These explanations included respectful learning, a modest attitude of learning and learning from others. For respectful learning, participants constantly talked about respecting other people including lecturers and classmates in the classroom. They said that

valuing the process of teachers' teaching and complying with classroom rules is beneficial to their intellectual development and personal growth. This is exemplified in the first learning activity observed, a workshop at the school of architecture. In this classroom observation, students paid reverence to the lecturer. In interviews, participants said, *"I would consider the continuity of the lectures"*; *"it would waste other students' time of learning"*; *"If everyone asks questions during lecturing, the classroom would be disorderly"*. Students also talked of reverence for elders, in particular, parents, regarding them as role models of learning. A common feature in participants' accounts was that parents' experiences had substantially influenced the choices of their current university subjects. Students claimed that they were willing to follow their parents' suggestions, and felt that they *"have responsibility to study hard and to reward them"*. Participants' consideration for others not only showed their respectful learning, but also demonstrated modesty which led to learning from others. Students' attitudes of humility and learning from others were a major aspect of students' practice, and appeared to influence potentially everything in their current learning context. As revealed by the third learning activity, students not only respect elders and authorities, but also respect peers. Moreover, students cited some of Confucius' well-known proverbs. For example, *"I learned in the Analects of Confucius that 'he was not ashamed to seek the advice of those who were beneath him in station (不耻下问)'"* ; *"Confucius says that 'Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them (三人行必有我师)', which shows the good attitude of modesty"*; *"I approve of learning from others, especially from someone who has more experiences than me or is better than me in some aspects"*.

This research result echoed my literature review, which suggests that respectful learning is an important aspect of Confucius' thinking about learning (Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988; Woods & Lamond, 2011). Also, all these explanations of students seemed to be in accordance with what Confucius said in the *Analects*, "Do not impose on others what you yourself

do not desire” (己所不欲勿施于人). Confucius expects learners to respect others’ feelings, to obey orders, to honour those higher than ourselves, and to learn from others, emphasizing the importance of role models in learning. For Confucius, knowledge is learned mainly from the ancients. He encouraged young people to respect their elders and even regarded the elders as ‘the pole star’, which is akin to a reference point for the movement of other stars. This principle of Confucius’ learning “refers to the idea that the elders must be an attractive model of what a virtuous person should be” (Woods & Lamond, 2011, p.676), and that young learners should adjust their behaviours in relation to this good example.

Consideration for others is a principle of reciprocity. This principle supersedes a detailed, written rule-based system of ethics, which is a common approach to developing ethical behaviours in learning. The “golden rule” is raised by Confucius, and describes a ‘reciprocal’, or ‘two-way’, relationship between oneself and others which involves both sides equally, and in a mutual fashion. He suggests that when we do something, we should think from other people’s stances, consider others’ feelings, and treat others as we would like to be treated. Hall and Ames (1987) assert that “*Shu* (恕) is always personal in that it entails *Zhong* (忠): doing one’s best as one’s authentic self” (p. 285). In all the relationships that Confucian morality revolves around, the primary emphasis is on undertaking responsibility for others with a sincere and conscientious heart (Yao, 2000). In this sense, Confucian ethics require conscientiousness (*Zhong* 忠) and mutuality (*Shu* 恕) “as principles in actions towards others” (Zhang, Cone, Everett & Elkin, 2011, p. 477).

### **Social responsibilities of learning (任重而道远)**

An examination of ethics from a Confucian point of view is likely to identify duties, virtues, and morals. In the *Analects*, Confucius encourages his disciples to take benevolence as a burden, suggests that learners should regard society

and family as the most important units, and emphasizes social responsibilities and duties of learning. For example,

*A Junzi must be strong and resolute, for his burden is heavy and the road is long. He takes benevolence as his burden. Is that not heavy? Only with death does the road come to an end. Is that not long (曾子曰：士不可以不弘毅，任重而道远。仁以为己任，不亦重乎？死而后已，不亦远乎？) (Book 8:7)*

In interviews, ten of the twelve participants resonated with these ideas, and suggested that their learning aims were to regard families and others as their responsibilities. As observed in the third learning activity organized by students, when discussing the movie *Forrest Gump*, students claimed that they wanted to do their best to be a good student and to do something useful for others, in particular, to make their parents proud of them. In this study, students said that the goal of learning was to find a stable job in the future and to shoulder their own responsibilities. S5, a student of the school of architecture stated that her learning ambition was to build better houses in rural areas. As she said:

*I grew up in a small town. Most of my classmates are also from the countryside. I often see people in rural areas spending all the money they have earned on building a house. But the house they build is not good, which makes me sad. I hope I can change this situation after I have a position. (S5)*

S3 came from the school of foreign languages and felt that she had a very ambitious dream when she was a child. But as she grew up, her dream became more and more practical. Then after she chose her university subject, she wanted to connect her expertise with the people around and to be able to do something to improve their English levels. As she said:

*For example, the child of my uncle is in a country school where there are no English classes. Although there is an English class in the town, most of the spoken English taught by the teacher is wrong. Every time I have been back home, I have had to correct their errors. So now I really want to be a teacher because this situation needs to be improved. (S3)*

S7, a student from the school of medicine, thought that if what we had learned could not improve people's living standards, it was worthless. He explained why he had chosen the current subject:

I chose oncology. I think the tumour incidence is very high in both China and foreign countries. There are no good methods to cure tumours. I want to do something in this field. (S7)

Moreover, for Confucius, helping and loving others is close to the idea of benevolence (*Ren* 仁). In the *Analects*, the emphasis is particularly on moral goodness, on loving others. When he encourages his disciples to talk about their learning orientation, Confucius acknowledges what each disciple has said, and then claims that he aims at bringing peace to the old, having trust in his friends and cherishing the young. For example,

Yan Yuan and Ji-Lu were in attendance. The Master said, "Why do you not each tell me what it is you have set your hearts on? (盍各言而志)"

Zi-lu said, "I should like to share my carriage and horses, clothes and furs with my friends, and to have no regrets even if they become worn (愿车马衣轻裘与朋友共敝之而无憾)".

Yan Yuan said, "I should like never to boast of my own goodness and never to impose onerous tasks upon others (愿无伐善，无施劳)".

Zi-lu said, "I should like to hear what you have set your heart on (愿闻子之志)".

The Master said, "To bring peace to the old, to have trust in my friends, and to cherish the young (老者安之，朋友信之，少者怀之)". (Book 5:26)

Most participants were in accordance with these views and tended to show 'benevolence' and their love for their family members. They demonstrated empathy for others when they chose their university subjects and thought that this might be related to cultural beliefs they received from childhood because their parents always taught them to help others. Some students had even changed their learning ambitions for the sake of family members. S9

claimed that she had changed her goal from being a policewoman to a doctor after one of her family members was ill. As she said:

When I was a child, I wanted to be a policewoman. But then one of my family members was ill. After I saw his sufferings, I decided to be a doctor. At that time, every time I went to hospital and saw people's sufferings, I thought it would be a happy thing to alleviate their sufferings. (S9)

In addition, Confucius' emphasis on responsibilities and social duties leads to pragmatic learning. For Confucius, an acceptable goal of learning, apart from personal improvement, is to competently conduct oneself within a civil service job (Book 13:5), a role Confucius views as important for changing society and improving others' lives. For example,

The Master said, "If a man who knows the three hundred pieces in the *Odes* by heart fails when given administrative responsibilities and proves incapable of exercising his own initiative when sent to foreign states, then what use are these to him, however many they may be? (诵诗三百，授之以政，不达；使于四方，不能专对；虽多，亦奚以为?)" (Book 13:5)

The majority of the participants appeared to resonate with this pragmatic orientation to learning and tended to say that the reasons for choosing current university subjects were to get a good job in order to fulfil their social responsibilities and duties. When choosing their university subjects, students often considered whether this subject leads to an industry in which they could easily find a job. Some of them even claimed that the aim of learning was just to find a good job; otherwise, learning might be a waste of time. Students considered that history and archaeology are very interesting, but choosing the two subjects might lead to difficulty in finding jobs. So, some of the participants preferred to be civil servants because they thought that this job was stable, and might provide a comfortable life for their parents and themselves. As S6 and S2 said:

My university subject is architecture, and I think it's easy to find a job after I graduate. I have a classmate who studies maths. He has finished his

undergraduate degree in the University of Shandong. At that time, I wondered what he could do after he graduated. (S6)

My ambition for learning is to find a stable job in the future and to shoulder my own responsibilities. I should be able to support my parents and let them have a comfortable life when they are old. As for myself, I should be able to support a family, which is very realistic. To be more specific, I want to be a civil servant. (S2)

The research materials presented above indicate that students in this study emphasized social responsibilities and duties in learning, showing their altruistic concerns for their family members, and demonstrating empathy for others. When they chose a university subject, participants wanted to find a good job in order to take responsibilities for their families and others. Their learning aims seemed to be pragmatic, practical and realistic as they regarded learning as a way of connecting expertise with the people around them and being able to do something for them. For example, some of the participants said, *“I really want to be a teacher because this situation needs to be improved”*; *“I went to hospital and saw people’s sufferings, I thought it would be a happy thing to alleviate their sufferings”*; *“I should be able to support a family, which is very realistic. To be more specific, I want to be a civil servant”*.

This research result was firmly aligned with that part of literature which suggests that Confucius has a pragmatic orientation to learning (Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Lee, 1996); Confucius perceives learning as unique, complex, and profound, with an aesthetically oriented pragmatic world view (Hall & Ames, 1987). This point of view is likely to identify social duties and responsibilities, and offers a foundation for human action, namely one’s sense of personal significance and concern for others. In other words, in Confucius’ opinion, individuals tend to view themselves as social participants embedded in the social group they belong to, rather than clearly defined individual entities. In the *Analects*, social obligations and the pragmatic orientation appear frequently. For example, *“A Junzi must be strong and resolute, for his burden is heavy and the road is long (士不可以不弘毅，任重而道远)”* (Book

8:7). Pragmatism as a philosophical perspective emerges from a Chinese correlative understanding of practice and “Confucianism has a rational value dimension which stresses the importance of consequences of actions, meaning that the future must be taken into consideration” (Zhang, Cone, Everett & Elkin, 2011, p. 477). Moreover, Confucius thinks that learning is to some extent a way of helping and loving others which is close to the idea of benevolence (*Ren* 仁). He argues that benevolence (*Ren* 仁) involves an altruistic concern for others and reflects the tender aspect of human feelings; he suggests that learners should regulate their conduct if they are conscious that their actions are hurting other people, and should act with empathy for others, while maintaining moral goodness (Huang, 2011).

### **Becoming a good student (君子)**

Confucius, often teaches his students to become virtuous persons, and argues that a person who wishes to follow his moral beliefs will have the goal of becoming a *Junzi* (君子) or a good student. For Confucius, the primary goal as an educator is not only to transmit intellectual knowledge to his students, but also to teach them how to be virtuous. In the *Analects*, many passages describe the importance of virtue (Book 2:1, 2:3, 5:3, 6:29), and suggest that a virtuous person is not only intelligent but also brave. For example,

The Master said, “A man of virtue is sure to be the author of memorable sayings, but the author of memorable sayings is not necessarily virtuous. A benevolent man is sure to possess courage, but a courageous man does not necessarily possess benevolence (子曰：有德者必有言，有言者不必有德。仁者必有勇，勇者不必有仁)”. (Book 14:4)

In interviews, participants were in accordance with these cultural beliefs, and tended to think that being a good student was the primary goal of learning. As observed in the third learning activity, the students would like to do something better to improve themselves, and then to be a good student. In this project, one quarter of the interviewees regarded virtue as the first priority during the process of personal growth. They felt that the cultivation of

morality sometimes was more important than acquiring knowledge in China, and that moral characters would influence interpersonal relations directly as people were often judged on their morality. The students said that people sooner or later would be involved in society where they not only use their knowledge but also learn how to communicate with others, and to make other people accept them. As S1 said:

Personally, I pay great attention to my moral development. I believe if a person doesn't have morality, he is nothing at all even though he has other good qualities. We can judge a person's morality based on small details, for example, his/her usual performance and behaviour. Anyway, I think morality is a basic part of a person, and should be the first priority. (S1)

Three medical students emphasized the importance of being a good doctor in their clinical practices. They said that doctors needed to comfort patients, to treat patients as their families, as well as to have 'benevolence'. As S8 said:

I think virtue is rather important for becoming a good doctor. Virtues such as respecting the old, cherishing the young and helping others are greatly influenced by the family. Likewise, a doctor should have medical ethics. Some doctors say being a doctor is to make a lot of money. If they think like this, they will neglect many factors when they treat patients. (S8)

Moreover, Confucius highlights that virtue is significant for being a *Junzi* (君子). He says that the *Junzi* does not help others to effect what is bad, but helps others to effect what is good (君子成人之美，不成人之恶) (Book 12:16). In the *Analects*, Confucius suggests that failure to cultivate virtue, like failure to go more deeply into what he has learned, would cause him concern. For example,

The Master said, "It is these things that cause me concern: failure to cultivate virtue, failure to go more deeply into what I have learned, inability, when I am told what is right, to go over to where it is, and inability to reform myself when I have defects (子曰：德之不修，学之不讲，闻义不能徙，不善不能改，是吾忧也)". (Book 7:3)

Participants appeared to be in accordance with this view. They not only emphasized the importance of being a virtuous person, but also felt that their teachers, parents and others served as a moral model to assist them to become a good student in the real world. They said that in the real world they learned moral beliefs from many people, including parents, teachers, schools and friends. Some participants claimed that teachers played a leading role in educating students to be virtuous at school. Other participants emphasized the influence of parents. As S4 said:

I think our morality is influenced by our parents because we spend the longest time with them. ... Basically, we are a combination of parents' characters and morality. Parents are their children's first teachers. I also think the role that school plays in the development of moral characters is not only reflected in classrooms, but also after class. The communication between teachers and students, as well as among students, gradually forms students' morality. (S4)

S2 said that a person's virtue was related to the whole society:

When I was a child, I learned some common senses of virtue from my teachers, parents and other relatives rather than from society. However, with growing up, I gradually realize a person's virtue is related to the whole society. (S2)

S5 highlighted the significance of elders and friends:

I think a person should have a good moral character so that he can survive in society. ...If you want to develop a proper attitude, you must make contact with friends who have good moral characters, and listen to the elders' instructions. Sometimes when I do something wrong, I will read books like the *Analects*, follow the instructions, reflect on myself, and change my attitude. (S5)

In addition, Confucius advocates a rounded development of students. In the *Analects*, he suggests that to become a *Junzi* (君子) or a good student, one needs not only to lean upon benevolence, but also take his recreation in the arts. For example,

The Master said, "I set my heart on the Way, base myself on virtue, lean upon benevolence for support and take my recreation in the arts (子曰：志于道，据于德，依于仁，游于艺)". (Book 7:6)

In this study, seven of the twelve students resonated with Confucius' emphases, and tended to claim that a good student should have an all round development of the moral, the intellectual, the physical and the aesthetic (德智体美). They said that one should not only study well, but also improve his/her overall quality, in particular, one must improve his/her moral levels. As S7 said:

Our Chinese people cultivate morality from childhood, for example, honouring our parents, behaving politely and so on. We must learn how to be a man before doing things. A good student should not only study well but also have a good moral spirit. It is an overall judgment. If one studies well, but has no excellent virtue, he or she definitely isn't a good student. Achievements and knowledge are no more important than morality. If you use your knowledge in the wrong way, it will affect society negatively. Above all, a good student should be one who studies well, has a moral character and behaves himself/herself. (S7)

The research materials showed that all the students would like to be a good student, viewed being a good student as a necessity of fulfilling their duties and responsibilities, and regarded self-cultivation or behavioural reform as a process of regulating one's behaviour and character toward becoming a virtuous person, or a good student. This consistency was not only exemplified in the third learning activity observed, but was also apparent in the interview materials. Participants constantly talked about all round development of the moral, the intellectual, the physical and the aesthetic, and referred to morality as the first aspect of personal growth, compared to knowledge and academic achievements. For example, they said, "*Our Chinese people cultivate in morality from childhood*"; "*I think virtue is rather important for becoming a good doctor*"; "*I think a person should have a good moral character so that he can survive in society*".

This research result supported part of my literature review (Hue, 2008; Tweed & Lehman, 2002), which suggests that in Confucius' opinion, an ideal person was culturally known as a virtuous person, or *Junzi* (君子). A *Junzi* (君子) aimed at "helping one connect the inner moral life of an individual to the outward social order" (Hue, 2008, p. 310). For Confucius, education is primarily moral education. He argues that a person who wishes to follow his moral beliefs will have the goal of becoming a *Junzi* (君子), and advises that "The *Junzi* agrees with others without being an echo (君子和而不同)" (Book 13:23). The term of *Junzi* (君子) appears 107 times in the *Analects* (Wang, 2000). According to Anh (2008), a *Junzi* (君子) is a "noble person who attempts to actualize Confucian cardinal virtues in concrete human relationships at any cost" (p. 103). The *Junzi* (君子) is a person who is an involved agent with others, rather than someone who is a detached intellectual or ivory tower philosopher (Wang, 2000). He or she takes stock of the situation they confront, as well as their own desires and concerns, before determining their course of action (Archer, 2000). Moreover, Confucius advocates a rounded development of students. He argues that to become a *Junzi*, one must acquire both fact-based knowledge and value-based knowledge (Huang, 2011), regulating one's behaviour toward the self-cultivation and refinement of one's character (Tu, 1998; Woods & Lamond, 2011, p. 674). In addition, Confucius attaches great importance to students' self-cultivation or behavioural reform, and thinks that learning is a constant modification of self by day-to-day engagement towards becoming a *Junzi* (君子). A learner should not only acquire morality, but also behave in accordance with what he or she has known and chosen. As some scholars suggest, self-cultivation is a central focus of historical Confucianism (Tu, 1998; Little, 2006, p. 64).

### **Pleasure of learning (学而时习之，不亦说乎)**

In the *Analects*, as discussed above, social responsibilities of learning, respectful learning and pragmatic learning appear frequently. However,

Confucius hopes that students will find pleasure in learning as well. He often says that he is the sort of man who forgets to eat when he works himself into a frenzy over some problems, who is so full of joy that he forgets his worries and who does not notice the onset of old age (发愤忘食，乐以忘忧，不知老之将至尔) (Book 7:19). For example,

The Master said: "Is it not a pleasure, having learned something, to try it out at due intervals? Is it not a joy to have like-minded friends come from afar?" (子曰：学而时习之，不亦说乎？有朋自远方来，不亦乐乎？)" (Book 1:1)

The Master said, "To be fond of it is better than merely to know it, and to find joy in it is better than merely to be fond of it (子曰：知之者不如好之者，好之者不如乐之者)". (Book 6:20)

Half of the participants resonated with this view, and thought that they found pleasure in their learning. Three quarters of them felt that learning was a complex mixture of effort and joy. Half of the students claimed that learning was a joyful process, and they were excited when they were engaged in it. As S5 said:

I learn painting all by myself ... and others think I work too hard, sitting there for a whole morning or afternoon, but I don't think I feel bored because I like it. I am the kind of person who gets very excited when I see a painting. My whole body is filled with excitement. (S5)

Three quarters of the participants also suggested that there was pleasure in learning although they sometimes felt that they lived like ascetic monks. For example, S1 said that when she applied new technology and information to her learning practice, she would feel a sense of success. S7 cited some of the Chinese ancient stories and Confucius' sayings to suggest that there is a joy in learning although the process is difficult. As he said:

There is a joy in learning, but it needs effort. For example, Confucius turned over the inscribed bamboo slips so many times that the wire of them was broken (韦编三绝). There are other examples of diligence, such as Zu Di (祖逖) and Liu Kun (刘琨) rising up upon hearing the crow of a rooster to practise

sword play and Kuang Heng (匡衡), drilling a hole in the wall to get light from his neighbour's house. ...But after reaching your goal, you feel joyful. For example, having finished a book, I feel that I have finally accomplished something and I have a good command of the medical knowledge in the book, and then I am happy. Effort and joy are interdependent. If you make an effort to learn, you will get the happiness of learning. The effort is related to the joy of learning ...In a high school textbook, there is a Confucius' sentence "Is it not a pleasure, having learned something, to try it out at due intervals (学而时习之, 不亦乐乎)?", which means that the process of learning is difficult, but the result is joyful. (S7)

Confucius also values effortful learning as it might lead to good results, to be specific, a civil service career, which makes students feel that learning is happy and valuable. In the *Analects*, Confucius tells his disciples that they seek neither a full belly nor a comfortable home, but have to study hard to improve themselves, and to carry out their social missions. For example,

The Master said, "The *Junzi* seeks neither a full belly nor a comfortable home. He is quick in action but cautious in speech. He goes to men possessed of the Way to have himself put right. Such a man can be described as eager to learn (子曰: 君子食无求饱, 居无求安, 敏于事而慎于言, 就有道而正焉, 可谓好学也已)". (Book 1:14)

Among twelve interviewees, except for S4, who felt that hard work was unnecessary and argued that good achievements were related to learning methods and people's intelligence levels, eleven students agreed with Confucius' ideas, and said that they valued effortful learning as excellent learning results came from working hard; one must constantly make an effort to accumulate knowledge and then he/she could be successful. They claimed that ninety nine percent of people became successful due to their diligence. As S1 said:

I think diligence should not only be applied to learning, but also to one's future job. Diligence is the means by which one can make up for one's dullness. If we are not smart and want to succeed in learning, we should be more diligent than others. ... Studying hard will make our knowledge base solid. When we have a

solid foundation, we will become intelligent and be capable of applying knowledge to our practices. (S1)

Some students said that if one had not studied hard in high school, he/she would not be admitted to university. S6, a student from the school of architecture thought that if one wanted to succeed in designing, he/she had to spend days and nights drawing professional pictures. As she said:

There is a saying that if we overcome more difficulties, we will be more excellent. Apparently, it's impossible for everyone to say that learning is a very happy thing because the learning process is kind of difficult... But after experiencing difficulties, the learning result will be very good, and eventually it will benefit us. ...I study architecture so I am often required to draw professional diagrams and we all find boring. But sometimes when I draw a very beautiful diagram I will have a sense of achievement. (S6)

The students from the school of medicine said that they needed to study harder, compared to the students from other disciplines. As S9 said:

Sometimes, learning makes me tired. ...On weekends, students of other disciplines go out to enjoy themselves, and only medical students stay in the classroom. ... We have to spend much more time studying because we study medicine. If we are not diligent, a minor error made by us will be dangerous, as we are dealing with people's lives. (S9)

Moreover, Confucius enjoys acquiring and transmitting essential knowledge (述而不作), and thinks that basic knowledge is fundamental for learning. In the *Analects*, Confucius suggests that if students learn the essentials from the previous generations, they could even know a hundred generations hence. For example,

The Master said, "The Yin built on the rites of the Xia. The additions and the abridgements can be known. The Zhou built on the rites of the Yin. The additions and abridgements can be known. Should there be a successor to the Zhou, even a hundred generations hence can be known (子曰：殷因于夏礼，所损益，可知也；周因于殷礼，所损益，可知也。其或继周者，虽百世，可知也)". (Book 2:23)

In this project, the majority of the participants was in accordance with this point and tended to think that they were happy with acquiring essentials, as fundamental knowledge was important. The students claimed that when human beings came into the world, they knew nothing and needed to learn knowledge one step at a time so that they were able to grow up, to improve their inner world and to create civilization. They suggested that the inheritance of knowledge was important as it was the summary of the ancestors' knowledge. S5, a student from the school of architecture, claimed that a summary of good experiences of the past would help the next generation. As she said:

I feel that knowledge is the summary of our ancestors' experiences. Especially when reading history, we have something to learn from the past. When I study architecture, I know that Alberti (Leon Battista Alberti) published a brochure in the renaissance period. He said that the man who didn't know architecture would be able to make a good building after reading it. No matter whether this is right or wrong, I think his book is a summary of good experiences of the past, and to some extent would help the next generation. (S5)

Three medical students also emphasized the importance of basic knowledge. They felt that clinical knowledge changed quickly while basic knowledge was seldom overturned as the latter to some extent consisted of basic principles. The students agreed that basic knowledge, such as pathology and anatomy were fundamental for operations in the clinical field; social psychology was important because it was useful for communicating with patients; physiology and biochemistry were also important as they were helpful for checking different indicators at medical examinations. As S7 said:

Abundant fundamental knowledge is just like a good base. We can construct a high building on a good base. Like learning medicine, we can't accept clinical knowledge directly without biology and biochemistry. Mathematics, literature and language are the same. Communication with patients would become a problem if our language wasn't good. ... We can take anatomy as example. Understanding of human beings' basic organs is beneficial for us if we want to become a surgeon in the future. Surgeons' anatomy knowledge is very good.

This is basic knowledge that we have to know, and then harmful accidents might be avoided in future operations. (S7)

For Confucius, respecting ancient knowledge leads to valuing rich experiences, which come from both books and teachers. In the *Analects*, Confucius claims that he enjoys transmitting rather than innovating, and he is dedicated to learning from predecessors. For example,

The Master said, "I transmit but do not innovate; I am truthful in what I say and devoted to antiquity. (子曰：述而不作，信而好古)". (Book 7:1)

In interviews, the majority of the participants resonated with the idea, and tended to think that they were pleased with learning from books and teachers as both of them were important for transmission of knowledge. As observed in the second learning activity, the students checked the textbooks constantly while listening to the lecturer, and seemed to value knowledge of both books and teachers. Participants suggested that books recorded knowledge in a formal way while the teachers delivered knowledge based on their own experiences. So, some of the students mentioned two main ways of acquiring knowledge. On one hand, one could learn book knowledge through his/her own efforts. On the other hand, one had to learn how to acquire knowledge from teachers as teachers can handle problems quickly and directly. S7 cited Confucius' proverbs to explain the significance of accumulating basic knowledge. As he said:

A book is a good teacher since there are precious experiences in it. ... We could read a book, but sometimes may not understand it. The teacher can get the problems solved and then we make an improvement. ...Confucius said, "I transmit but do not innovate (述而不作)", and if we have doubts and don't go to the teachers, we will remain unsure for a long time. (S7)

S6, a student from the school of architecture, used a metaphor 'catalyst' showing that one could not see something clearly if he/she just learned book knowledge; however, by adding the teachers' personal understanding, things would become clear. As she said:

For example, there are many things which we can't understand in the book 'History of Chinese architecture'. Though the author offered detailed explanations and related pictures to illustrate those things, we can't understand them no matter how many times we read them. Later, the teacher took us to the temple and explained something according to the real things, and then I understood them. We can't understand something through the book even though there are diagrams to illustrate it. ...We will understand it after the teacher's explanations. ...The teacher is just like a catalyst. (S6)

S8, a student from the school of medicine, said that she felt happier, better and clearer after she got teachers' instructions and illustrated the functions of both books and teachers in clinical practices. As she said:

Our books were published five years ago, and China is developing fast. Knowledge in the clinical area is also changing rapidly. The teacher is using new methods. There might be some confusion when we read books by ourselves, and we don't know which is new or old. ... We can't understand the key points because we lack experience, and don't have opportunities to have contact with patients. We can understand the key points after teacher's explanations. ... I would feel bored if I just learned and read by myself, as my understanding wasn't clear. I would feel happier, better and clearer after I got the teacher's explanations. (S8)

These research materials revealed that students tended to regard learning as a joyful process. They said that they feel happy because they like their subjects. For example, in the third learning activity observed, when talking about the movie *Forrest Gump*, some of the students said, *"we don't know about our destiny. We just enjoy what we are doing. We are university students. Learning is our job. We have to study hard and then we will have a sense of achievement and happiness"*. In interviewing, participants also said, *"I am the kind of person who gets very excited when I see a painting. My whole body is filled with excitement"*; *"having finished a book, I feel I have a good command of knowledge in the book, and then I am happy"*; *"There is a joy in learning"*. S7 claimed that *"In the high school textbook, there is a Confucius' sentence, 'Is it not a pleasure, having learned something, to try it out at due intervals (学而时习之, 不亦乐乎)?"*

This research result appeared to be inconsistent with previous literature, and was to some extent overlooked by scholars in my literature review (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Carson, 1992; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). For instance, Tweed and Lehman (2002) summarize five aspects of Confucius' learning values such as effortful learning, behavioural reform, pragmatic learning, acquisition of essential knowledge and respectful learning, paying little attention to Confucius' pleasure of learning. In fact, in the *Analects*, Confucius appears to enjoy in learning and also hopes that students will find pleasure in learning. He often says that he is the sort of man who is so full of joy that he forgets his worries and who does not notice the onset of old age when learning (发愤忘食，乐以忘忧，不知老之将至尔) (Book 7:19). That is, for Confucius, learning to learn and finding a joy in learning is part of the commitment to learning which is a strong feature of each of the learners, and this commitment is underpinned by a sense of enjoyment which is important to maintain (Cope, 2005). Confucius also says that being fond of learning is better than merely to know it, and to find joy in it is better than to be fond of it (知之者不如好知者，好之者不如乐之者) (Book 6:20). From Confucius' concept of learning, the biggest challenge "is not in acquiring information, but rather in determining what information is most accurate and relevant to us" (Eger, 2011, p. 19). In other words, in Confucius' opinion, enjoying the process of knowing how to separate good from bad information and knowing which information has value in our quest for knowledge and wisdom is a unique and essential skill for learners. More importantly, the Master makes a clear and definite statement in the first passage of the *Analects* that having learned something and trying it out at due intervals is a pleasure and a joy, just like having like-minded friends coming from afar (学而时习之，不亦乐乎) (Book 1:1). Confucius here suggests that learners should find joy in learning, as well as advocating an educational system, which grounds all students in pleasure, beauty, and wonder, and creates citizens who are awakened not only to their humanity, but to the human enterprise that they inherit and will perpetuate (Eger, 2011).

It was also evident in these research materials that students appeared to enjoy effortful learning and to value essential knowledge because diligence and a solid foundation lead to what they want, which makes them happy. For example, in the third learning activity observed, when discussing the movie *Forrest Gump*, some students said that Forrest did not look too smart, but he was diligent and then he became a hero. In interviewing, participants not only emphasized the importance of hard work in learning, but also highlighted the significance of books and teachers in acquiring basic knowledge. They claimed, *“If we are not diligent, a minor error made by us will be dangerous, as we are dealing with people’s lives”*; *“I think diligence should not only be applied to learning, but also to one’s future job”*. *“I feel that knowledge is the summary of our ancestors’ experiences”*; *“I would feel happier, better and clearer after I got the teacher’s explanations”*.

This research result was supported firmly by my literature review (Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Liu Baonan 刘宝楠, 1988; Li Zehou 李泽厚, 1996). For example, Tweed and Lehman (2002) argue that Confucius values essential knowledge, and believes that learning is closely tied to hard work. In the *Analects*, Confucius says that a *Junzi* should devote his efforts to the roots, because once the roots are established, the way will grow from there (君子务本，本立而道生) (Book 1:2). He also says that a *Junzi* should be patient with what he is learning or doing, and then he will be able to reach his goal (欲速，则不达) (Book 13:17). Confucius suggests that one should learn gradually, and that students need to work hard to become more virtuous and more skilled (Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988; Liu Baonan 刘宝楠, 1988) so as to fulfill social responsibilities and duties. He emphasizes the process of learning rather than the result. He thinks that one should lay a solid foundation in pursuit of knowledge. He further advises learners to enjoy the process of learning rather than going after quick results. Therefore, for Confucius, *“learning is directly attached to hard work”* (Tweed & Lehman, 2002, p. 91). He speaks of effort much more than of gift, talent and ability, and believes that not quickness but effortful learning including respecting previous

knowledge and valuing rich experiences is instrumental in attaining success (Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988; Liu Baonan 刘宝楠, 1988). Even Confucius himself views his role as one of acquiring and transmitting knowledge rather than expressing personal hypotheses (述而不作, 信而好古) (Book 7:1).

Despite Confucius' characterization of himself as a transmitter rather than a creator, some scholars argue that Confucius is not as conservative as others such as *Li Zehou* 李泽厚 (1996) portray him (Tan, 2003). Confucius' apparent denial of his own creativity may attest more to his modesty than to a neglect of creativity. A sage is closely associated with creativity (*Zuo* 作) in the Confucian tradition. According to the *Book of Rites*, "one who creates is called sagely; one who transmits is called perspicacious. A perspicacious sage means one who transmits and creates" (Tan, 2003, p. 82). Given that Confucius repeatedly denied being a sage, it is not surprising that he should also consider himself falling short of creativity.

### **Questioning learning (每事问)**

For Confucius, as discussed above, challenge and criticism without extensive preparatory knowledge is inappropriate. In other words, Confucius' conception of learning is not focused mainly on challenging, evaluating and generating knowledge. However, to some extent Confucius does suggest questioning learning, and does expect his students to voice their own opinions, to reflect on previous knowledge, to acknowledge uncertainties and mistakes, and to figure things out in practice.

### **Voicing own opinions (当仁不让于师)**

As discussed above, Confucius is famous for his view on modesty or humility in Chinese history. However, Confucius is able to show his initiative when having opportunities to practise benevolence, although he seldom seeks credit for himself. For example,

The Master said, "When faced with the opportunity to practise benevolence do not yield precedence even to your teacher (子曰: 当仁, 不让于师)". (Book 15:36)

Among the twelve participants, seven students were in accordance with the idea, and thought that when we were capable of doing something, we should do it positively. They felt that we should be properly modest as excessive modesty meant hypocrisy. S4 claimed that it is necessary for people to be modest, but people should control it to certain extent because sometimes going too far is as bad as not going far enough. As he said:

I think people should be properly modest. ... You should know what you really know and admit what you don't know. Don't pretend to know what you don't know. ... Don't calculatedly tell others that you don't know if you know it. It's better to seek truth from facts. ...I think you show modesty to yourself, not to others. If you think you are not good enough, you should acquire more knowledge. Don't make others think you are modest. But you should have a modest learning attitude, you should think you haven't learned enough knowledge and should learn more. Instead of showing your modesty to others, you should regard modesty as an attitude to warn yourself. (S4)

S2 added further information on this point, and thought that if students were unable to speak out opinions, it would not be good for the process of teaching, and to some extent, it would affect acquisition of knowledge. As she said:

We should not be too modest, otherwise we would gradually become unwilling to speak out our opinions, giving a teacher a kind of illusion - whether or not I have made students understand this point, whether or not I have made it clear on some aspects. Thus, it's not good for the process of teaching, and to some extent, it would affect the acquisition of knowledge. (S2)

### **Self-questioning (日三省吾身)**

For Confucius, self-reflection is as important as the acquisition of essential knowledge. In the *Analects*, Confucius encourages his disciples to examine themselves on what have been done every day (日三省吾身), and reflect on what has been passed on from books and teachers. For example,

Every day I examine myself on three counts (吾日三省吾身). In what I have undertaken on another's behalf, have I failed to do my best? In my dealings with my friends have I failed to be trustworthy in what I say? Have I failed to practise repeatedly what has been passed on to me? (Book 1:4)

Confucius advises his disciples to question themselves on whether they are able to understand other things when they are told one thing (闻一知十), and ask themselves if they have mastered what has been learned through a comprehensive understanding. For example,

The Master said to Zi-gong, "Who is the better man, you or Hui?"

"How dare I compare myself with Hui? When he is told one thing he understands ten. When I am told one thing I understand only two." (回也闻一以知十，赐也闻一以知二)

The Master said, "You are not as good as he is. Neither of us is as good as he is." (Book 5:9)

Half of the students appeared to resonate with this opinion and thought that they would not accept all knowledge from the ancestors. They acknowledged that we could not totally accept knowledge shown by other people, and should examine theoretical knowledge with doubt. For example, S5 felt that sometimes well-known scholars' work would limit the next generation, and students would be trapped in the worship of those scholars. S9 claimed that we need to tell the difference between essence and trash in learning; we need to learn new things if knowledge is updated. As S1 said:

...We need tell the difference after we got the fundamental accumulation of knowledge, then we can discover which kind of knowledge is useful or which direction we should take. ...We shouldn't always listen to what the teacher or book says, and we must have our own abilities to tell the difference. (S1)

### **Acknowledging uncertainties and mistakes (知之为知之，不知为不知)**

Although he is a great scholar, Confucius still admits his uncertainties. When he goes inside the Grand Temple, he asks questions about everything (入太庙，每事问) (Book 10:21). For example,

The Master said, “You, shall I tell you what it is to know. To say you know when you know, and to say you do not when you do not, that is knowledge (子曰：由！诲女知之乎！知之为知之，不知为不知，是知也)”. (Book 2:17)

In interviewing, except for S2, who did not want to admit his own uncertainties in certain contexts, the eleven other students were in accordance with Confucius’ views, and claimed that they would admit their ignorance. As revealed by the first learning activity observed, a young woman said that she was not too sure about a certain point, and suggested that Professor Zhang should give further explanations about it. In this study, interviewees felt that people would be interested in something they did not know about, such as why the stars can sparkle, and why the moon can be full and empty. Students thought that a man was more knowledgeable when he admitted that he was lacking in knowledge because he realised that he was ignorant. Two medical students, S7 and S8, cited Confucius’ proverb, “To say you know when you know, and to say you do not when you do not, that is knowledge (知之为知之，不知为不知，是知也)”, and gave examples from their practices:

We have to admit our mistakes and have a proper attitude towards our own mistakes, especially as clinical medicine is quite different from other subjects. ... For example, you can cure an illness if you know what to do and you can’t cure it if you don’t know. You can’t cure it if you don’t know how because what you treated is a person. ... You dare not say you know it when you don’t know. You can’t cure patients blindly since it will cause serious results. For example, a patient has a stomach-ache and you have to know the reason. Is it due to eating wrong things or a blockage of the bowel or the effect of inflammation of the stomach and the bowel? If it is due to a blockage of the bowel, it would become worse if we give him some medicine to increase his bowel movements. So you have to admit your ignorance and ask other doctors to diagnose the ailment and help you. ... Confucius said, “To say you know when you know, and to say you do not when you do not, that is knowledge (知之为知之，不知为不知，是知也)”. Han Yu (韩愈) said in ‘*Teachers’ Remarks* (《师说》)’ that people are not born to know everything, and everybody has some confusion, which means we have to ask for teachers’ help. (S7)

Confucius also values learning from mistakes. He even thinks that he is a fortunate man, as whenever he makes a mistake, other people are sure to notice it (丘也幸，苟有过，人必知之) (Book 7:31). For example,

The Master said, "In his errors a man is true to type. Observe the errors and you will know the man (子曰：人之过也，各于其党。观过，斯知仁矣)". (Book 4:7)

Most participants agreed with this view, and tended to recognize that a mistake was inevitable in learning. Students said that mistakes could to some extent show one's personal growth and intellectual development, and could remind us which aspects we should strengthen. The students suggested that we should treat a mistake with the appropriate attitude, and see it as a friend, not an enemy. As S2 said:

We can't think making a mistake is a bad thing and we should see it in the overall sense. At first, usually making a mistake is a normal thing, and we can't avoid it. Then we must have the appropriate attitude to admit the mistake bravely. ... And then I have to work out why I made such mistakes and what to do next in case I make the same mistakes. ...I always feel that there are many things that I don't know. (S2)

### **The importance of learning practice (多闻多见)**

For Confucius, uncertainties are inevitable and mistakes are usual. However, both of them can be resolved in learning practice. Confucius criticises those who can recite all 300 poems in *the Odes* and yet cannot put what they have learned into practice (Book 13:5) and suggests that students should use their ears and eyes widely in their learning practices. For example,

The Master said, "There are presumably men who innovate without possessing knowledge, but that is not a fault I have. I use my ears widely and follow what is good in what I have heard; I use my eyes widely and retain what I have seen in my mind (子曰：盖有不知而作之者，我无是也。多闻，择其善者而从之；多见而识之)". (Book 7:28)

In this study, three quarters of the participants resonated with Confucius' emphasis, and claimed that they could figure out doubts in practice. S3, a student from the school of foreign languages, suggested that her classmates took every opportunity to speak English in their learning practice, and gradually they were able to speak English fluently. As she said:

I think that uncertainty and doubt can be solved in practice. I think my classmates and I are eager to speak English fluently. ... We are not good first but forced to be good in the long run because we speak English quite often in our learning practice. We communicate with our roommates. ...If we did not practise speaking English frequently, for example, I did not speak English in the holidays, I would find that the level of my oral English had declined after the holidays. (S3)

The three students from the school of architecture also believed that practice was important in their discipline. They claimed that they were unsure about many concepts of construction in the classroom such as concrete, periphery beam and reinforcing steel; if the lecturer took them to the building site, they would understand and remember these concepts quickly. As S4 said:

I think learning from practice is important. My subject is construction engineering ... and there are many projects waiting for us to do. The things we have learnt in books are not sufficient ... We have to learn them from practical experience. I participated in designing a residential apartment a few months ago. I forgot the things which I had learnt in school. I have to specifically consider things such as wind tunnels, stairs, and the location of windows, as well as the air-conditioner board and the location of the air-conditioner. I can't remember these things if I don't learn them from seeing them in practice. (S4)

Some students suggested that practice not only corrected mistakes and solved uncertainties, but also could open a new window for their learning. S2, from the school of foreign languages, thought that according to book knowledge, the teacher taught students to say 'How do you do', 'How are you', 'Good morning, Good afternoon' when meeting people; however, after communicating with foreign teachers, students knew another form of greeting, for example, 'How is everything going?', and then students were

able to start a topic in a different way. S9, a student from the school of medicine, gave an example from her clinical practice:

For example, when a patient said that his chest was muffled I only considered the heart so I gave him oxygen to breathe and made him sit still. I was flustered when the symptom didn't ease. Then I asked the teacher, who suggested checking the patient's heart and lung, and then diagnosed serious pneumonia. So the experience I got from practice is important and we have to explore from practice. (S9)

S5, a student from the school of architecture also had the same opinion, and said that she and her classmates always visit Shanghai (上海) and Suzhou (苏州) to see the buildings there before graduation as the image created by the computer is quite different from what we experience in reality. As she said:

My discipline has to learn from practice. ...We always visit Shanghai and Suzhou to see the buildings there before graduation. I see the modern buildings in Shanghai and Chinese traditional gardens in Suzhou. I think I have learnt a lot from their processing method, especially after observing the gardens in Suzhou. In addition, 'space' is always mentioned in my discipline. Sometimes the 'space' created by the computer gives an illusion ...I can feel the 'space' in reality to see whether it is the image I want. I am always struck by the illusion, so I think going to see it in real life is very necessary. ...Because the image created by the computer is quite different from what we experience in real life. (S5)

These research materials showed that questioning learning implied certain characteristic behaviours and played a significant mediating role in students' learning practices. Participants thought that speaking out their own opinions would be good for the acquisition of knowledge, and help them seek truth from real life experiences. Participants also said that a good learner needs to reflect on what has been learned. They talked about their uncertainties and mistakes in their learning context and emphasized the importance of practice in dealing with uncertainties and mistakes. Students' courage to admit their own mistakes in certain contexts, and their desire to try things out for themselves appeared to bring benefits for their study. Some of them cited Confucius' proverb, "To say you know when you know, and to say you do not

when you do not, that is knowledge (知之为知之，不知为不知，是知也)". They said, *"We should not be too modest, otherwise we would gradually become unwilling to speak out our opinions"; "we need tell the difference after we got the fundamental accumulation of knowledge, then we can discover which kind of knowledge is useful or which direction we should take"; "I have to work out why I made such mistakes and what to do next in case I make the same mistakes"; "The experience got from practice is important and we have to explore from practice"; "I think that uncertainty and doubt can be solved in practice"; "I think learning from practice is important"; "My discipline has to learn from practice"*.

This research result did not completely support the studies of some scholars such as Kennedy (2002) and Carson (1992), who claim that Chinese students are passive in learning, and lack critical thinking, though it was consistent with that part of literature (Shi, 2006; Lee, 1996; Watkins & Biggs, 2001), which suggests that Chinese students are open-minded, and value active thinking. In fact, as a great scholar, Confucius often voices his opinions, reflects on himself, values the importance of practice, as well as admitting his uncertainties and mistakes. He suggests that when one is faced with the opportunities to speak up, he/she should not yield precedence even to his/her teacher (当仁，不让于师) (Book 15:36). More importantly, Confucius emphasizes a combination of learning and thinking, and suggests that if one learns from others but does not think, one will be bewildered; if, on the other hand, one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be imperiled (学而不思则罔，思而不学则殆) (Book 2:15). This self-reflective understanding of self suggests that an individual needs to compare him/herself to others with a view to his/her own self-refinement or self-cultivation so as to become a person who performs on his/her self with the aim of becoming an ethical subject (Besley, 2005). Moreover, Confucius acknowledges that knowledge comes from uncertainties and mistakes. He encourages his disciples to say they know when they know, and to say they do not when they do not (知之为知之，不知为不知) (Book 2:17). Confucius thinks that making a mistake is a process that one has to

experience, and is valuable for personal growth and intellectual development as in one's errors one is true to type; if we want to know the man, it is better to observe the errors he/she has made (人之过也，各于其党。观过，斯知仁矣) (Book 4:7). In addition, the Master claims that learning from practice is a proper way for solving uncertainties and correcting mistakes. He advises his disciples to use their ears widely and follow what is good in what they have heard; to use their eyes widely and retain what they have seen in their mind (多闻，择其善者而从之；多见而识之) (Book 7:28). Most importantly, Confucius applies the principle of questioning learning to his teaching practice, and says that he never enlightens anyone who has not been driven to distraction by trying to understand a difficulty or who has not got into a frenzy trying to put his ideas into words (不愤不启，不悱不发) (Book 7:8). In other words, in teaching, if Confucius has pointed out one corner of a square to his disciples and they do not come back with the other three, he will not point it out to them a second time (举一隅不以三隅反，则不复也) (Book 7:8). Confucius here highlights the significance of reflection in learning, and suggests that a good learner needs to learn by analogy, to draw inferences about other cases from one instance, and to judge the whole from a part. Therefore, for Confucius, "questioning is central to eliciting explanations, postulating theories, evaluating evidence, justifying reasoning and clarifying doubts" (Pedrosa-de-Jesus, Lopes, Moreira & Watts, 2012, p. 558), and this can lead learners to engage in critical thinking and reasoning.

In summary, participants explained and described different aspects of Confucian ideas of learning and perceived them to be influential. Confucian ideas suggested by participants in this study included gentlemen, benevolence, pleasure of learning, questioning learning, pragmatic learning, hard work, modesty, to name a few (see Figure 4.2).

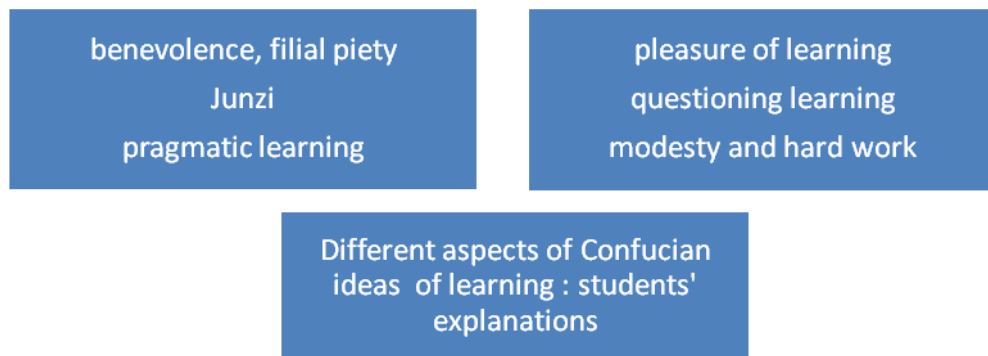


Figure 4:2: Confucian ideas of learning revealed by students

The research materials suggested that these Confucian ideas penetrated into participants' learning practices in various ways including parents, teachers, classmates, friends, books and self-study. This penetration, functioning as a synthesis, supported students' learning, influenced students significantly in both learning orientation and learning methods, and brought benefits for their practices. Participants constantly claimed, *"Confucius' sayings of 'a Junzi must be strong and resolute, for his burden is heavy and the road is long (士不可以不弘毅, 任重而道远)', which gave me spiritual support" (S11); "Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them (三人行必有我师)', which to some extent is helpful to raise my level" (S7); "Confucius' sayings of 'when a student finds that he can more than cope with his studies, then he takes office (学而优则仕)' helped me fulfill my social values" (S10).*

These influences revealed by students were evident in part of the literature (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Watkins & Biggs, 2001; Yao, 2000), which regards Confucian values as significant components of modern social-cultural attitudes affecting learning and communication practice in contemporary China. Students' understanding of these Confucian values resonated with the study of Woods and Lamond (2011), who identify seven Confucian principles such as benevolence, righteousness and trustworthiness, and discuss how the principles influence business managers and how they are applied to achieving

ethical self-regulation in management. These research materials also indicated that although students did not learn things according to Confucius' book on a day by day basis, their teachers and parents inculcated these ideas from their childhood, through their educational environment, to their current university learning context. As Archers (2003b) points out, "delineating the properties and powers that emerge at different levels of social structure, is just as pertinent to agency" (p. 17). Students claimed that many things in China have some kind of connections with the thoughts of Confucius. They suggested that they experienced Confucian ideas in various ways including those imposed by society, community or school, significant others (parents, teachers, classmates) and their own daily observations and practices. Although it is not as obvious as it used to be, the influence of Confucian ideas seems still to exist in various aspects of today's society such as etiquette, modesty and honouring teachers. These embedded cultural elements go with students into the learning context, playing an important ongoing role in developing their ideas about education and learning, and determining subsequent actions. As Archer (2003a) argues, structural properties may have the capacity to operate as constraints and enablements, which "are transmitted to us by shaping the situations (structural and cultural) in which we find ourselves, such that some courses of action would be impeded and others would be facilitated" (2003a, p. 4). However, powers of structure as constraints and enablements require activation by agents. In other words, structural emergent properties impinge upon people and condition their doings; on the other hand, these properties are received and responded to by agents in turn.

In this part, I mainly explored to what extent students' classroom behaviours and practices could be understood in terms of Confucian ideas of learning, how students made explanations for their observed classroom behaviours and learning practices, how these explanations, descriptions and accounts of students reflected Confucian ideas of learning, and how these Confucian

values impinged upon Chinese students, shaped/informed/influenced students' classroom behaviours and practices, and condition their learning.

In the following part, I focus on students' deliberations to examine how Confucian values are received and responded to by students' agents in turn, how courses of action are produced through the configuration of concerns and the reflexive deliberations of students' agents who determine their practical projects in relation to their circumstances, and how students weigh up or deliberate on the influence of Confucian ideas of learning, coupled with other competing ideologies.

## **Part 2: Students' deliberations**

In this part, I present research materials in relation to the other part of the main research question posed in Chapter 1:

How do students understand, weigh up or deliberate upon the influence of Confucian ideas of learning, coupled with other competing ideologies?

It also addresses some related assumptions posed in Chapter 1:

- Student's accounts or understanding may reveal competing ideologies, which might have a potential influence on their behaviours and practices. Among them, Confucian ideas of learning may remain influential to Chinese learners;
- Different sources of ideologies may interact in complex ways to shape students' learning behaviours and practices;
- Confucian ideas of learning could be differentiated from others although they are inter-related and even overlap;
- Students' understanding or deliberations may or may not reveal inconsistencies or conflicts between Confucian ideas of learning and other competing ideologies;
- Students' deliberations on the influence of Confucian ideas and other ideologies may include processes of external adaptation and internal integration.

In this study, Confucian ideas served as the paramount thought that had become a part of the cultural values underlying Chinese students' learning practices, compared with other competing ideologies. Six themes regarding students' deliberations on Confucian values and other competing ideologies emerged from the research materials, and are presented and discussed, namely:

- Comparing Confucian values with other Chinese thoughts;
- Differentiating Confucian values from western ideologies;
- Preferring the Chinese learning culture;
- Critiquing the western learning model;
- Tensions in Chinese students' minds;
- Adaptations of the western model in China

The steps taken in considering the influence of competing ideologies described by students in this study, again following the procedures employed in Part 1, are as follows: for each theme, considering the complex nature and the uniqueness of each participant's deliberations, evidence in relation to the influence of other competing ideologies, together with Confucian ideas of learning was selected; then students' descriptions, explanations and deliberations are discussed, and the results of the other part of the main research question and some related assumptions are explained, in reference to possible explanations of the results, their convergence with or divergence from my literature review and relevance to theories.

### **Comparing Confucian values with other Chinese thoughts**

In this study, students knew other Chinese traditional thoughts coming into play, such as Taoism (*Dao Jia* 道家), Mohism (*Mo Jia* 墨家) and Legalism (*Fa Jia* 法家). Participants claimed that these three ways of thinking have their own influence in Chinese history. They made reference to this influence with various levels of awareness and attention.

All participants mentioned Taoism and talked about the influence of this form of traditional Chinese thought on their study. S10 elaborated on *Wuwei* (无为)

- letting nature takes its own course, and felt that this view was beneficial at a certain period of time, for example, in an age without fierce competition, but it was inappropriate if it was always used because this view seemed negative. S7 thought that there was too much competition in modern society, and this view did not accord with reality; if a person did nothing, he/she would not move forward and then he/she would lag behind as modern society was moving forward at a full speed. In contrast to S7 and S10, other students such as S12, S4 and S1 thought that Taoism advocated individual morality and reduced people's excessive greed and selfishness. In addition, S11 and S5 valued Taoist 'Naturalness' (道法自然). As S11 said:

I am more interested in Taoism. "Naturalness" is an important concept of Taoism. It refers to a natural state of being. The best state is a newborn state, which is especially emphasized by *Lao Zi* (老子). *Lao Zi* (老子) promotes the idea that education should not be a process of imposing human civilization on human beings, but a process of minimalizing the social impact on them. Taoists believed that people's nature would be damaged through education. (S11)

Three quarters of the participants talked of Legalism, and thought that Legalism was concerned with criminal law, put more emphasis on solving things by force and involved a relatively strong competitive awareness.

From *Shang Yang* (商鞅) to the Master *Han Feizi* (韩非子), they all thought that the law should be supreme, and education should take the 'law' as its centre. Legalists don't want the masses to master too much knowledge and think that the masses only need to master legal knowledge. (S12)

One third of the participants talked about Mohism. However, they did not offer further information.

More importantly, participants said that Taoism, Legalism and Mohism had less influence on their learning than Confucianism did. Among twelve participants, eleven students thought that Confucianism was in a dominant position in their learning practices, compared to Taoism, Legalism and Mohism. Along with this opinion, S10 suggested that Confucian thoughts had a huge influence on her learning, perhaps accounting for four fifths. She said,

Taoism and Legalism played a certain role at a certain period of time and in a specific historical environment, for example, the legalism during *Qin Shihuang* (秦始皇), the time of the first emperor in China. Except for these specific periods in Chinese history, Confucian values have played a leading role, and still dominate the daily lives of Chinese people; as for my learning, it accounts for four fifths. (S10)

This was supported by S12, who claimed that the influence of Legalism and Mohism was almost nil and that Taoism had influenced her by two fifths while three fifths was Confucian values. As she said:

For me, I feel Confucian values are more important than other Chinese traditional thoughts are. Parents, teachers and other people educated us with Confucian thoughts. From childhood, we were always told that we should study hard, and then maintain the family's honour. These ideas are closely connected with Confucian values because Confucius emphasizes the social function of education. Besides, we have often been exposed to Confucius' learning concepts such as "Is it not a pleasure, having learned something, to try it out at due intervals? (学而时习之，不亦乐乎)" since we were children. (S12)

Student 11 was the only one who perceived that Taoism had the same level of important influence on her learning and growth as Confucianism did.

I think Confucian and Taoism have influenced me in different ways. When I study hard, I may remember Confucius' sayings such as 'a *Junzi* must be strong and resolute, for his burden is heavy and the road is long (士不可以不弘毅，任重而道远)', which motivates me to learn. When I feel tired, I may remember the ideas of *Zhuang Zi* (庄子) such as self-relaxation and freedom. (S11)

In addition, S7 mentioned *Mao Zedong* (毛泽东) when he talked about Confucian influences. The student said that *Mao Zedong* (毛泽东) was certainly influenced by Confucius' thoughts although he launched the Great Cultural Revolution. As he said:

For example, Chairman Mao, what has influenced him firstly is Confucius' 'filial piety' (*Xiao* 孝) ...as well as modesty. For example, Chairman Mao (respectful form of address to *Mao Zedong*) often says, "Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them (三人行

必有我师)”。Chairman Mao also cites Confucian phrases and sentences in his own writings, though he often criticizes Confucian values. (S7)

The research materials indicated that students acknowledged that Confucian values had influenced them more significantly than the three other forms of Chinese traditional thoughts had. More importantly, participants described some differences between the three ideologies and Confucian values. Based on the differences, the students weighed up Taoism, Confucian thoughts, Legalism and Mohism, and tended to think that Confucian values prevailed in their daily learning practices, compared to Taoism, Legalism and Mohism. In particular, participants valued the social functions of Confucian ideas of learning, and felt that the aim of Confucius' education was not only an academic ideal but also a social ideal. Students stressed that 'when a learner finds that he can more than cope with his studies, then he takes office (学而优则仕)', and explained that this belief of Confucius was still held by Chinese people in modern Chinese society. In the students' opinions, being an official enabled people to realize their social values, to do something useful for their community, their society and their nation, and ultimately fulfilled their social responsibilities as presented in Part 1. For example, students claimed, *"I feel Confucian values are more important than other Chinese traditional thoughts are"*; *"Confucian values play a leading role and dominates the daily lives of Chinese people; as for my learning, it accounts for four fifths"*; *"Chairman Mao also cites Confucian phrases and sentences in his own writings though he often criticizes Confucian values"*; *"we have often been exposed to Confucius' learning concepts since we were children"*.

The research materials affirmed that part of my literature, which stated that as a significant component of modern attitudes, Confucian values to some extent affected learning and communication practice in contemporary China (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Watkins & Biggs, 2001; Yao, 2000). Gan (2007) contends that there are three thoughts permeating Chinese people's lives including *Deng Xiaoping* (邓小平)'s thought with its emphasis on reform and market competition, *Mao Zedong* (毛泽东)'s thought with its emphasis on revolution,

and the Confucian thought underlining the social lives of the Chinese people. However, although Marxism (*Deng and Mao*) is “a political and cultural mechanism which weights what is positive or negative, higher or lower in Chinese traditional cultures and Western discourses” (Cheng & Xu, 2011, p.612), “the Confucian pedagogy, which amazingly embraced the essence of contemporary learning theories, is still retained in China’s contemporary education” (Cheng, 2011, p.591). As Ames (2003) says, like Deweyan pragmatism in America, Confucianism in China is a rather contested placeholder for the rich and varied resources which define in some degree the predominant and persistent cultural sensibilities of its native soils (p. 403).

### **Differentiating Confucian values from western ideologies**

In this study, one third of the participants appeared to know little about western ideologies. Two thirds were aware of the ideas of Plato, Dewey, Rousseau and Montessori. When talking about liberal education, students revealed different views. Nine students had not heard of liberal education before this interview. Three other students appeared to know a little about this mode of educational thought; however, they felt extra work needed to be done with liberal education to meet the requirements of the Chinese educational system (Figure 4.3).

| Participants | Knowing or not | Accepting or not                  | Feasibility in China                       |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| S1           | Not knowing    | Prefer being experts in one field | An ideal plan, a long way to go            |
| S2           | Never heard    | No further details                | No further details                         |
| S3           | Not knowing    | No further details                | No further details                         |
| S4           | Having no idea | Prefer focusing on one subject    | Impossible                                 |
| S5           | Not heard      | No further details                | No further details                         |
| S6           | Having no idea | No further details                | No further details                         |
| S7           | Heard a little | Good for behaving in society      | Difficult                                  |
| S8           | Not heard      | Literally sound pretty good       | Difficult                                  |
| S9           | Never heard    | People have limited energy        | Impossible                                 |
| S10          | Not heard      | Literally doesn't seem too bad    | Difficult to change the Chinese belief     |
| S11          | Heard          | Pretty good and essential         | Difficult for examination-oriented systems |
| S12          | Heard          | Not practical                     | Might be welcome in the future             |

Figure 4.3: Participants' different opinions of liberal education

Among the three participants, S11, a young woman from the school of Chinese literature was one who was able to give further details about liberal education. Although she thought that in current China there might be some difficulties in launching liberal education due to the examination-oriented educational system, she believed liberal education would help students in the future as it offered another perspective when facing some questions. She claimed that as liberal education had broad knowledge and interdisciplinary courses, it might solve the problem caused by over-specialized knowledge in the modern universities, and enable students to think independently. Then based on her discipline, S11 talked about how she benefited from liberal education and offered valuable experiences:

Take myself as an example, I have studied Chinese classical literature, and am also interested in comparative literature. I have read some western books and some books about aesthetics, for example, the books of *Zhu Guangqian* (朱光潜). So little by little, I find I move far away from my own subject, but I can have opportunities to see my own subject from different perspectives. That is, I can study Chinese classical literature from perspectives of comparative literature and aesthetics. So Chinese literature can be judged and understood from many perspectives. (S11)

S7 was the second person who claimed to have heard about liberal education before this interview. He referred it to the Confucian concept of 'learning extensively' (博学之):

I heard of it a little. Confucius has promoted learning extensively (博学之), pondering prudently (慎思之), inquiring thoroughly (审问之) and practising devotedly (笃行之). This is similar to liberal education. Learning broadly will be good for one to comport oneself in society. (S7)

Along with S11 and S7, S12 also claimed that she had heard about liberal education before, but she said that she knew little about it. This student thought that it was impossible for a person to acquire a balanced development in every aspect.

Among nine participants who claimed to have no idea of liberal education, five talked about it from its literal meaning and gave some details while four did not offer any further information.

For the five participants, two students appeared to think that liberal education is acceptable. S10 felt that it appeared to be a comprehensive educational system, paying attention to students' all-round development. This was supported by S8, who said that liberal education enabled students to have the ability to practise and to acquire new knowledge:

I have not heard of it before. From its literal meaning, I think it is pretty good. Actually, university aims at educating students to have the ability to practise and to acquire new knowledge. ... Students might not do the jobs related to

their disciplines after graduation. A student who is keen to learn will do better than others will. ... So I think liberal education which focuses on comprehensive knowledge would make students access every aspect of life easily in the future. It's also a kind of practice. (S8)

In contrast to S10 and S8, the three other participants felt that people have limited energy, and it was impossible for everyone to know about everything (S9). S4 argued that it was not easy for a person to learn one subject well because we are in an age of knowledge explosion:

I have no idea of it. Does it involve everything but in a superficial way? In my opinion, with the rapid development of modern society, now we are in an age of knowledge explosion. It is not very easy for a person to learn one subject well. For example, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences is only specialized in one field, not in all fields. (S4)

Similarly, S1 preferred being professional in a specific area:

Actually I did not know about liberal education before the interview. But from the literal meanings, it seems to focus on comprehensive learning. So I think liberal education should not be implemented through the whole learning process of students. Whatever one learns, one should first learn broad knowledge, then narrow down and make progress. ...Thus, making everyone become professional will help them play their roles in specific fields. (S1)

More importantly, participants talked about the difficulties of liberal education in China. From Figure 4.3, four students did not offer any further information, but eight students thought that it was difficult to implement liberal education in China. Although these eight participants gave different reasons, the majority of them tended to attribute this difficulty to the Chinese educational system. They stated that on one hand, students would fail to study further if they had not achieved good results under the Chinese examination-orientated educational system; on the other hand, implementing liberal education might make students acquire comprehensive knowledge; however, it would be difficult to find a job without specialized knowledge. As S7 said:

I think it is difficult to implement liberal education under the pressure of the examination-oriented educational system. Knowing a lot is not equal to high grades. Taking Maths as an example, a student who only knows about astronomy can't get good marks. A student who knows a lot may not get employed. Getting employed is a reality. Implementing liberal education may make students acquire comprehensive knowledge, but without having specialized knowledge, people would say that knowing everything is equal to knowing nothing. ...Learning is to find a good job. Finding a good job is realistic because it enables us to make a contribution to society. (S7)

S1 and S12 were in line with S7, and felt that it was difficult to achieve the goal of liberal education in contemporary China due to the Chinese pragmatic learning and examination-orientated educational system. As they said:

I think it is hard to achieve that goal. ... Cultivating talents and professionals with broad knowledge is an ideal plan, which still has a long road to go. (S1)

It may become popular in the future. ... At present, students just want get high grades in order to graduate successfully, and to study further or to find a good job. (S12)

S8, S10, S11 were the three participants who believed that liberal education was fundamental and essential. However, they still thought that it was difficult to implement it in current China because many Chinese people would like to study subjects which were useful and helpful for finding a well-paid job (S8).

In particular, S10 suggested three points about the difficulty: the Chinese view of learning and teaching was deep-rooted; China was not as rich as western countries; it might take more time to educate a student if China adopted liberal education. As she said:

I think it's a bit difficult. First, teaching views are very important. For example, if teachers let students make an outdoor observation, people will think the teachers just let students play, they are not really teaching students, and it is a waste of their tuition. So the Chinese teaching views are deep-rooted and hard to change. We need time and patience to change them. Besides, we are not as

rich as western countries. For example, in remote rural areas, there are many students but few teachers. ... And it takes more time to educate a student if we adopt liberal education. Now we are in a fast developing society, just like assembly lines. (S10)

The research materials presented above revealed that participants knew a little about some western educational ideologies, and felt that these theories seemed to differ from Confucian thoughts. However, they were unable to offer further details regarding the differences. As exemplified in the third learning activity observed, from the discussion about the Bible, the students seemed to know little about the deep meanings of the western ideology although they were familiar with some terms and words. Interviewees also talked about liberal education. Some of the students thought that liberal education was an ideal plan, but it was difficult to implement it in China, and would have a long way to go. For example, participants said, *“I think it is difficult to implement liberal education under the pressure of the examination-oriented educational system”*; *“I think it is hard to achieve that goal. ...and still has a long road to go”*; *“I think it’s a bit difficult ... as the Chinese teaching views are deep-rooted and hard to change. We need time and patience”*. Most of the participants had not heard of liberal education before this interview, and failed to offer explanations. For example, students said, *“I have not heard of it before”*; *“I have no idea of it”*; *“Actually I did not know about liberal education before the interview”*.

This research result was inconsistent with that part of the literature review (Mok, 2005; Tang & Wang, 2009; Gao, 2010), which points out that like elsewhere across the world, the western terms of ‘academic capitalism’, ‘neo-liberal’ and ‘entrepreneurial universities’ were becoming increasingly popular in shaping the higher education sector in China. Likewise, the result did not support that part of my literature review (Panel of the Outline, 2010; Liang, 2007; Zhang, 2007), which suggests that the Chinese government has moved forward in policy making of higher education, and is widely implementing ‘general education’ or ‘liberal education’ (通识教育或博雅教育) in the area

of innovative university personnel training. Liberal education was advocated in the 19th century being defined as an educational form for promoting broader undergraduate education infused with its spirit. It became central to much undergraduate education in the United States in the mid-20th century, though it declined during the Second World War. In the early years of the 21st century, many western universities and liberal arts colleges reviewed their curricula to include liberal education. In China, the literature has also focused on liberal education during recent years, the Harvard model of curriculum reform has been introduced, and it is argued that liberal education is an important part of undergraduate education in Chinese universities (Du & Chen, 2009). The Chinese government officially issued 'the Planning Outline of Mid-long Term Educational Reform and Development' in July of 2010, and was widely implementing 'general education' or 'liberal education' for broad knowledge, transferable skills and personal enrichment. However, the students in this present study appeared to know little about this western educational thought. This might be in relation to the feature of this university, which is considered to be in one of the more backward areas in contemporary China.

### **Preferring the Chinese learning culture**

Associated with Confucian ideas of learning, participants in this study were aware of the Chinese learning culture, and appeared to perceive the Chinese learning model to be teacher-centred: teachers taught students knowledge while students acquired it passively. S1 and S11 commented on this style as 'inculcation/infusion teaching'. They described a scenario in which lecturers basically deliver lectures while students sit in classrooms to listen to the lecturers. As S11 said:

I feel that the traditional teaching model is basically teacher-centred. In classrooms, the students are in a passive position, and the teacher is absolutely in a superior and dominant position. (S11)

In line with S1 and S11, other participants such as S6, S4 and S12 elaborated on behaviours and practices of learners and teachers in classrooms. They felt that Chinese students grew up obediently sitting in classrooms and listening to teachers. They thought that Chinese students had been doing this since they were children. As S4 said:

China's learning model does not encourage communication between teachers and students. Since I was in school, students have always been listening to teachers in classrooms. (S4)

More importantly, some participants acknowledged that this Chinese learning model had its advantages and disadvantages, just like a coin had two sides.

One of the advantages students mentioned was that this learning model could lay a solid knowledge base. In this study, nine students highlighted the significance of the Chinese learning style in accumulating knowledge. They believed that China's teaching and learning model was good for acquiring basic knowledge, which would be useful in the future. As S10 said:

Emphasis on accumulation of knowledge is beneficial for our future study. For example, we were required to recite the book of *Three-Character Classics* (*Sanzijing*, 三字经) from childhood, but did not understand its meaning. However, we are able to come to understand its content now after we have grown up and accumulated certain experiences. The teacher-dominant classroom can help students get answers to their questions, and make students respect teachers. (S10)

Along with this idea, S11 put more emphasis on the amount of information which this learning style gave to students:

In my opinion, this way can transmit a large amount of information to students. In classrooms, students constantly take notes, and thus are able to learn about their predecessors' knowledge in a short time. It is easy for students to inherit previous knowledge. (S11)

S6, a young woman from the school of architecture, also said that the style could save time in gaining basic knowledge and then gave an example from her learning experiences:

Well, for example, I took a course called *The History of Foreign Architecture* when I was an undergraduate student. In the course there were many stories ... telling us how a building was designed and events that occurred at the time. We were required to memorize a large amount of information by the lecturers. This would lay a solid foundation for my further study. So I think this kind of teaching method is pretty good. (S6)

Another example was given by S3, a young woman from the school of foreign languages. She claimed that Chinese teachers used simple words to make students understand complex theories. In her opinion, students were greenhorns who tended to acquire knowledge, not to criticize knowledge; so they needed teachers to guide them to comprehensive understanding.

The views of S2, also from the school of foreign languages, resonated with those of S3. He believed that the learning style required teachers to teach knowledge in a logical fashion, guiding students to learn easily:

I think it is necessary, especially when we study foreign languages, foreign cultures, translation skills etc... After all, teachers have richer experiences and knowledge than students do. So it is necessary to follow teachers' lead. (S2)

S1 and S12 regarded the traditional learning style as an essential base for gaining the university entrance. As S1 said:

It [*the Chinese traditional learning style*] was helpful for me to gain the university entrance. Otherwise, I couldn't have been enrolled in the university and my horizon would not be broadened. (S1)

S1 was supported by S12, who gave more details about how she was helped to gain the university entrance by this learning method:

This kind of learning enables us to master knowledge which is required by the examination-oriented educational system. It enables us to get high marks to be admitted by universities. That's the biggest thing for us. People are familiar

with the model and think it is natural. Most parents acknowledge this method because parents have told us the goal of learning is to get high marks and to be admitted by universities. (S12)

S5 was the one who only recognized positive aspects of the Chinese traditional learning model. She appeared to enjoy the Chinese educational system and said that she could handle it well in her learning practices. As she said:

In Chinese classrooms, students are required to preview before class and to review after class. Chinese teachers deliver a great deal of knowledge in classrooms, so students always have to listen to the teachers carefully. If students preview before class and review after class, they will know what they should learn. Some students may say this kind of teaching and learning model is cramming learners with knowledge. This is because these students are too lazy to preview before class, and so they do not know what they want to learn. But if students preview before class, they will know what they need. (S5)

One of the disadvantages students mentioned was that the Chinese learning model seemed to be rigid. As observed in the four learning activities, students seemed to be quiet in the classrooms due to the rigid classroom atmosphere. In interviewing, participants also talked of the rigid atmosphere. As S7 said:

In our classrooms, teachers are regarded as having a leading role and students have to listen to teachers. Under this circumstance, Chinese students' thoughts are narrow, are limited and they have few wild ideas. (S7)

Then S7 suggested that the classroom should be dynamic:

I think the classroom atmosphere in China should be more active and make students think divergently. Besides, there should be more communication between students and teachers. (S7)

S2 and S1 shared the same views that this learning style would hinder independent development of students, in particular, initiative and innovation. As S1 said:

In my opinion, our traditional Chinese teaching and learning model can't help students develop the ability of exploration and thinking. Now students in China are acquiring knowledge without actively thinking. So Chinese students lack the ability to think independently and to deal with problems individually, compared to western students. (S1)

S11 recognized that the Chinese learning style had three disadvantages, including not being active in class, as well as lacking critical thinking and creativity:

The disadvantage of this traditional way is that students are not active in class. Furthermore, knowledge they get from teachers is second-hand. ... In addition, the teacher is at the centre and in a dominant position. The students seldom challenge the teachers, and so lack critical thinking and creativity. (S11)

S10 resonated with the above opinion:

It is a teacher-dominant learning model, which emphasizes accumulation rather than application, similarity rather than individuality, theory rather than practice, memorization rather than reflection, and strict discipline rather than open-mindedness. (S10)

Most importantly, nine participants tended to relate the teacher-centred style to Confucian ideas of learning. Some thought that Confucius has much more influence on the Chinese learning culture than Taoism, Legalism and Mohism have. As S11 said:

...Confucius has much more influence on the traditional Chinese approach to learning than Taoism, Legalism and Mohism. ... I think that Confucius has good teaching methods, such as dialogue-based and discussion-based teaching, but we do not inherit them well. (S11)

S12 highlighted the saying of Confucius—'when a student finds that he can more than cope with his studies, then he takes office (学而优则仕)' (Book 19:13), and thought that it was this saying that had decided the main aims of people's lives, the direction of education and the learning style in China. As she said:

In ancient China, people thought that ‘when a student finds that he can more than cope with his studies, then he takes office (学而优则仕)’. It is quite similar nowadays. We have been encouraged by parents who inform us, ‘Study hard, get high marks, find a good job, and have a high social status’. Students follow this teaching model and learning method from primary school to university. So ideas of parents and teachers are passed on from generation to generation. ...This means that Confucius has the supreme status which can’t be changed by anyone. ... The aims of our lives, the direction of education and the learning style are affected by Confucianism. (S12)

S11 had a similar opinion, but she emphasized another learning idea of Confucius, ‘I transmit but do not innovate (述而不作)’ (Book 7:1). She felt that Chinese learners tended to inherit knowledge from the ancients and to follow authorities because of this learning idea. As a result, students appeared to be quiet in classrooms, and preferred accumulation rather than creativity. As she said:

‘Transmitting without innovation (述而不作)’ - these four words have affected tens of thousands of generations. ... We have been ‘transmitting without innovation (述而不作)’, that is, we always think the achievements of the ancients are good. We are told that what we should do is to inherit them, and so China has a retro tendency. For example, judging a poem is always based on some standards of the ancients. In learning practices, students think that those things written in books are true. Students are rarely able to think from other perspectives, and this has led the students to lack creativity. (S11)

S9 said that the learning model might be related to the Chinese tradition as it is inherited from the previous generations, but she did not mention Confucius’ ideas of learning. She said:

I think our model is kind of rigid. This may be related to our tradition for it is inherited from the previous generations. In classrooms, teachers deliver the lectures and students listen to teachers. (S9)

Similarly, S7 also connected this learning style with the Chinese tradition but did not mention Confucius. He said that Chinese students would not express

their ideas in class as they have inherited the idea of modesty from previous generations or their parents since they were children.

However, the participants in this study did not heavily criticize the teacher-centred learning style although they realized some of its disadvantages. Three quarters of the students thought that this learning style was a consequence of the particular conditions in China where there were so many students in a classroom that teachers were unable to employ an open-ended teaching method. S3 suggested that if Chinese teachers used open-ended teaching methods, perhaps it would not work well.

This was echoed by S12, who said that there were more than a hundred students in a class in some towns:

Teachers are teaching on the platform while students are listening. There are many students in a Chinese classroom. For instance, there are forty or fifty students in a classroom in our primary schools, fifty or sixty in junior high schools and seventy or eighty in senior high schools. What's more, there are more than a hundred students in a class in some towns. (S12)

The research materials indicated that students appeared to perceive the Chinese learning model to be teacher-centred, but the teacher-centred learning style was not heavily criticised by them. In contrast, the students emphasized its advantages, such as accumulation of knowledge although they acknowledged that the Chinese learning model was somewhat rigid. For example, participants noted that, *"emphasis on accumulation of knowledge is beneficial for our future study"*; *"In my opinion, this way can bring a large amount of information to students"*; *"I think this kind of teaching method is pretty good"*. Most importantly, when reflecting on their learning style, participants tended to relate it to the Chinese tradition, in particular, Confucian ideas of learning. The students constantly said, *"these words of Confucius such as 'pragmatic learning (学以致用)'; 'transmitting without innovation (述而不作)', 'when a student finds that he can more than cope*

*with his studies, then he takes office (学而优则仕) have affected tens of thousands of generations”.*

This research result did not completely confirm the findings of Ballard and Clanchy (1991), Carson (1992), and Carson and Nelson (1996), which argue that Chinese students learn by imitating others rather than by independent thinking, and rely heavily on memorising or rote learning. The students in this present study to some extent admit that learners tended to inherit the thinking of the ancient, to follow authorities, and to be unwilling to express their opinions in class, because of the above Confucius’ ideas. However, they seemed to appreciate the learning culture and believed that the traditional learning style required teachers to deliver knowledge to students systematically, guided students to learn easily, helped students gain the university entrance and ultimately supported students to fulfill their learning goals. Their critical reflection and appreciation of their traditional learning model indicated that the students were active and reflexive learners. This research result was consistent with that part of the literature (Shi, 2006; Chan, 1997; Lee, 1996; Watkins & Biggs, 2001), which describes Chinese learners as actually valuing active and reflexive thinking.

### **Critiquing the western learning model**

In this study, the majority of the participants claimed that they had only heard of the western learning style, with the exception of the three students from the school of foreign languages who had experienced foreign teachers’ classes. The students described their feelings about what they perceived as the western learning approach and how the approach differed from the Chinese learning model. They thought that this learning style was student-centred which aimed to develop students’ independent thinking (S10). As S1 said:

...the western model is different in that it is student-centred, focusing on students’ individual abilities, thinking and exploration. In other words, in their classrooms, students have a leading role and teachers facilitate students’ learning. (S1)

Students described the features of the model, which distinguished it from the Chinese learning culture. I found that there were three main aspects: development of students' abilities, interaction between teachers and students and weak knowledge foundation.

### **Development of students' abilities**

Some participants focused on how the western learning model develops students' abilities. They felt that the model would allow learners to think actively because it led learners to find out the answers by themselves without offering direct answers. For example, S11 acknowledged that western teachers were good at developing students' abilities of exploration and thinking. As she said:

*It [the western learning model] relatively encourages students to challenge authorities. The students can directly point out that what the teacher has said is wrong or have their own ideas about some topics. The students can do this in classrooms without standing up or putting their hands up. This can provide a relaxed learning atmosphere and encourage students to think critically. (S11)*

Also, in S9's opinions, in the west, students are encouraged to think actively, so the learning model is good for inspiring students' creativity.

In line with this view, S7 stated that in western classrooms, students played leading roles while teachers played the roles of facilitators in students' learning. Students can challenge teachers and articulate their ideas.

S3, a young woman from the school of foreign languages, recalled how she experienced the western educational model in her postgraduate learning practice, and how this model extended her thinking. As she said:

*I think the western method seems flexible. ...During my postgraduate period, I have attended some linguistic courses taught by foreign teachers. They do not just teach us theories; instead, they let us discuss the theories and then voice our opinions. Besides, they do not give us standard answers, but make us think aloud, and extend our thinking ability. They usually leave us with some*

questions to think about, and let us choose one viewpoint and try to improve it with sufficient reasons. (S3)

S8 and S12 talked about how the western learning model valued students' interests. They said that the western students seemed to be more independent because they learn according to their interests. For example, S12 emphasized research done by high school students in western countries, in particular, on insects.

### **Interaction between teachers and students**

S4, S5 and S2 seemed to value the interaction between students and teachers in western classrooms. They felt that teachers and students in the west communicate with each other in classrooms, which might cultivate some excellent talents. S2's experiences gave him another perspective on the western learning model:

As a student from the school of foreign languages, I know about the western learning model from attending foreign teachers' classes. Inwardly, I like the western teaching model because it encourages communication between teachers and students in a positive classroom atmosphere. Thus, teachers can fully inspire students' independence, making them think by themselves. (S2)

S6 and S12 seemed to be interested in the arrangement of western classrooms, and described the western classroom as an open model. They mentioned the layout of classrooms, in which the desks were put in a circle, creating an active and comfortable atmosphere. As S12 said:

It seems that their classrooms are very open. Students are free and active, and the relationship between students and teachers is relatively equal. The arrangement of their classrooms is quite different from ours. Their desks are arranged in a circle, which reflects some deep things although it is only a kind of shape. But we have platforms for teachers to give lessons while students sit still to listen. (S12)

## **Weak knowledge foundation**

A quarter of the participants clearly pointed out some weaknesses in the western learning style, with more considerations being given to a weak knowledge foundation including lack of the spirit of inheritance and unsystematic teaching method. S3 realized that when she attended foreign teachers' classes, foreign teachers might just let students discuss by themselves and seemed not to be able to guide students to comprehensive understanding. As she said:

The western model may develop students' divergent thinking. But sometimes, when the foreign teacher leaves a question for students to discuss, the students may not think deeply, so they need teachers' guidance. In contrast, Chinese teachers do well in this aspect. They teach complicated theories in an easy way. In other words, they use simple words to make students understand some complicated theories. Instead of doing this, foreign teachers may just let students discuss by themselves. But students are greenhorns who need to acquire knowledge not to criticize knowledge, so they need teachers to guide them to comprehensive understanding. So I feel the western model can't have the same effect on students as the Chinese traditional model can. (S3)

These research materials revealed that participants acknowledged that the western learning style was student-centred. They explained how the approach differed from the Chinese learning model. Participants shared a variety of views regarding the characteristics of the western learning style such as developing students' abilities and interaction between teachers and students. However, not many of them acknowledged that this foreign learning model affected their own learning styles. In contrast, participants talked about the difference between the two learning models, and how their learning practice reflected these differences. Based on the distinctions, students pointed out some weaknesses of the western learning style such as a weak knowledge foundation, the lack of the spirit of inheritance and unsystematic teaching methods. For example, S1 was aware that Chinese teachers were good at teaching knowledge and western teachers were good at developing students' ability to explore. S3 had also realized that when she

was studying in foreign teachers' classes, foreign teachers might just let students discuss by themselves and seemed not to be able to guide them to comprehensive understanding. *"I feel the western model can't have the same effect on students as the Chinese traditional model can". "Foreign teachers are unable to provide students with a solid knowledge base and detailed information about grammar"*.

This research result did not support evidence from other studies in my literature showing that the Chinese learning culture was inferior to the western learning culture (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Carson, 1992; Carson & Nelson, 1996). From the students' reflections regarding the two learning models, it seemed difficult to determine how to tell the good learning culture from the poor, though in the context of globalization, educational systems around the world "have adopted more or less the same structure underpinned by the same philosophies" (Cheng, 2011, p. 597), and the discourse of "modern epistemology—in terms of ways of looking, valuing, and thinking—dominates most Chinese academic circles" (Wu, 2011, p.570).

### **Tensions in Chinese students' minds**

As shown above, participants shared a range of views about the characteristics of the western learning model. However, not all of them acknowledged that this foreign learning model affected their own learning styles significantly. Students explained tensions in their minds.

More than half of the participants clearly stated that they did not think that the western learning model had conflicted with their views of learning. Participants said that they were used to the traditional teaching model, and did not think that they could completely accept the western model. For example, S6 and S1 said that the western model did not conflict with their learning concepts since they grew up with the Chinese learning culture.

In line with S6, S3 offered more details from her own experiences, and did not think that the two models conflicted with each other in her learning practice.

As she said:

I feel the western model can't have the same effect on students as the Chinese traditional model can. Therefore, I don't think the two models conflict with each other in my learning practice. What we should do is to find the advantages of each model and apply them in practice. If we just focus on the disadvantages of each model, then we will get nothing. As people always say, 'Do not let life fit us; let us fit life'. (S3)

S5 believed that the model of previewing before class and reviewing after class in China was good enough and had functioned well. So although she was interested in the western learning model, she did not think that there was any conflict with her own learning practice.

S2, a young man from the school of foreign languages, attended courses taught by both foreign teachers and Chinese teachers. He described how he benefitted from both the western and the Chinese model:

The teachers of the school of foreign languages know about the western teaching model, so they would apply it in their teaching practice, and encourage students to develop their thinking abilities in classrooms. (S2)

More importantly, participants tended to prefer the Chinese learning style. They provided different reasons for this choice such as a deep-rooted habit and solid knowledge base.

### **The deep-rooted habit**

S4, S7 and S9 referred to the reason for their preferred learning behaviours as deep-rooted habits. They claimed that since they had heard of the western model, they had not changed their learning behaviours as they had been used to the traditional learning model for a long time. S9 said that she had just come to know the western model recently, and that changing her learning habit was difficult.

S7 valued the traditional model and felt that its influence on him was still accounting for sixty five or seventy percent. This was resonated by S12 who

thought that the percentage of the influence of the Chinese learning style in her learning practice was seventy or eighty per cent.

S1 suggested that the previous habit was so deep-rooted in Chinese students' learning that the western learning ideas could not influence them significantly.

As she said:

I think it is about habit. For example, most of my classmates and I just sit in the classroom and listen to teachers. ...This habit is so deep-rooted in my learning practice that it's impossible to change suddenly as change needs much more effort. In other words, we know something about western learning ideas, but they do not significantly influence us except for those students who study foreign languages. In a word, those students who are usually in contact with western culture will be more significantly influenced. But students of other disciplines will probably always follow the traditional model. (S1)

S4 also claimed that he grew up in the Chinese educational system and so the traditional model played a dominant role in guiding his learning behaviours.

As he said:

I think I am a typical student growing up with Chinese traditional education. Teachers deliver lectures and I listen to them carefully and take notes. Sometimes I approach teachers after class to discuss some questions. (S4)

S3, a young woman from the school of foreign languages who had attended both Chinese teachers' lectures and foreign teachers' lectures, suggested that generally the western model had not made her deny the traditional model although she had been influenced by her foreign teachers' open teaching styles. She felt that she was still following the traditional model on the whole because she had been influenced by this model so long that she could not change her learning habits in a short time. As she said:

I follow the traditional model on the whole, because I have been influenced by this model so long that I can't change my learning habits in a short time. So, in most situations, I attend the classes to listen to teachers and review after class. When I review what I have learned, I will think deeply. In my high school, the aim of learning was to pass exams, and to enter a university. While

attending the university, I have been influenced by my foreign teachers who ask us to think by using brainstorming and to think about other information related to what we are studying. In this way, we may know more about how to think deeply. But generally speaking, the western model has not made me deny our traditional model. (S3)

### **The solid knowledge base**

Three participants mentioned accumulation of knowledge, and suggested that this was why they still preferred the traditional learning model. S11 explained how the Chinese learning style was important for accumulating knowledge, and believed that following the traditional model enabled students to acquire knowledge, to gain insights in classrooms, to develop their own opinions, and to form their own conceptual systems. As she said:

I acquire knowledge from teachers as much as possible by following our traditional model. I think this is a great benefit for me. Each teacher has his own characteristics and different views, and so I can get important ideas and a solid knowledge base in Chinese classrooms. Then I can read books, and develop my own opinions and conceptual systems based on this foundation. That is, our own conceptual system is based on a solid knowledge base. ... When the teacher talked about certain topics, he conveyed personal views, which inspired our desire to study further. (S11)

So, in S10's learning practices, respect for teachers and building up the knowledge base was highlighted. As she said:

On most occasions, I still follow the Chinese learning model, because we haven't changed our thinking yet. We are disciplined by classroom rules, and our learning and teaching model helps us lay a very solid knowledge foundation. So in the classroom, the teacher plays a dominant role, and we seldom express our ideas. This is a habit we have developed since we were children. (S10)

S2 experienced the teaching style of foreign teachers. However, he still tended to keep quiet, to follow teachers' guidance, and to take as many notes as he could in classrooms. As he said:

I think it is necessary to follow the teacher's lead, especially when we study foreign languages, foreign cultures, translational skills, etc... After all, teachers have richer experiences than students do. (S2)

On the other hand, nearly half of the participants acknowledged that the western model conflicted with their learning beliefs. S8 and S10 felt that they should change their learning methods and communicate with teachers because asking questions was better for academic development and personal growth.

Along with this opinion, S7 suggested that the classroom atmosphere in China should be active so as to make students think divergently, and that there should be more communication between students and teachers.

S9 and S11 explained how they dealt with the two learning models in their own learning practice, and stated that they still prefer the Chinese classroom while finding the western one appealing. As S9 said:

I think I still prefer the Chinese classroom. We listen to teachers and ask questions after class. Traditionally, attending classes is to show our respect to teachers. If teachers make mistakes in the classroom, we students can point them out after class. I believe teachers will accept it. I think if a student stands up suddenly to question a teacher in the classroom, it would be awkward. However, unlike our Chinese children, who have had to do home-work since they were very little, western children grow up more happily. So I look forward to it as well. (S9)

S12 claimed that she loved the traditional Chinese learning style, which enabled her to gain higher grades, but she also enjoyed questioning and challenging. As she said:

The traditional learning method has advantages since it enables me to get high marks and helps me to be admitted by universities. I think we also need independent thinking. We need to approach problems actively and try to be skeptical about what we have mastered. We can become a complete person with new ideas and thoughts by questioning and thinking. (S12)

Participants also compared the western model with the Chinese learning culture. There was considerable strength of feeling stated by participants about what the difference between the two learning models was, and how their learning practice reflected these differences. S1 was aware that Chinese teachers were good at teaching knowledge while western teachers were good at developing students' ability to explore and think.

S3, a young woman from the school of foreign languages, shared her different experiences of learning English in the classes of both foreign and Chinese teachers:

Particularly when learning English, we students develop skills such as reading, speaking, listening and translation. Foreign teachers may be good at teaching the spoken language. But if students want to improve their English levels, they have to memorize knowledge and thus improve their understanding. For example, the intensive reading course is taught by Chinese teachers for the reason that they can provide students with a solid knowledge base. Foreign teachers are unable to provide students with the solid knowledge base and detailed information about grammar. (S3)

This was supported by S11, a young woman from the school of Chinese literature who talked about her feelings of learning both western and Chinese literature. She thought that the history of western literature first denied the old and then created their own system, while Chinese literature did much on constructing. As she said:

I had this kind of feeling when I studied the history of literature, which is constantly changing. For example, the western neo-classicism advocated reason and principle. Then in order to oppose it, romanticism appeared. This broke down the original mode of neo-classicism, and then realism appeared in order to put forward its view, but it also negated the point of view of romanticism. It is a process of breaking down the old system and establishing a new one. The history of western literature first denies the old and then creates their new system. China did much on constructing. Confucius believed the ancients had done well, what we should do is only to 'transmit', which had a big influence on our modern learning mode. (S11)

However, after the comparison, some participants hoped to be able to combine the two learning models although they knew the differences between them. For example, S1, from the school of foreign languages, summarized the features of the western learning model, and suggested the idea of combining the two learning models. As she said:

The two models have their own advantages. Chinese teachers are good at teaching knowledge while western teachers are good at encouraging students' exploration and thinking. So I would prefer to combine the two models together. However, it is not easy to do it. (S1)

These research materials indicated that, when comparing the western learning model with the Chinese one, on one hand, the majority of the participants clearly stated that although they knew the differences between the two models, they did not think that the western one conflicted with their views of learning as they grew up with the traditional Chinese model, and were used to it. On the other hand, some of the participants acknowledged that the western model conflicted with their learning beliefs, and suggested that the Chinese classroom atmosphere should be dynamic and there should be more communication between students and teachers. However, they still appeared to prefer the Chinese classroom as it enabled them to achieve higher grades, to gain the university entrance, and finally to find a good job. They said, *"I think I still prefer the Chinese classroom. We listen to teachers and ask questions after class. Traditionally, attending classes is to show our respect to teachers"*.

This research result largely confirmed the study of Fouts and Chan (1995), which points out that "the Chinese have recognized the need to modernize their society, while at the same time attempting to maintain many traditional Chinese values and ways" (p. 528). In the era of globalisation and internationalisation, the rising tide of human capital theory has led to increasing demands for "efficiency" and "accountability" in higher educational settings around the world (Hayhoe & Zha, 2004). Universities are drawn

inexorably into a global culture with pressure for a kind of homogenization around the cutting edge of scientific knowledge. However, this so-called global culture has caused strong reactions in some places, in the form of the determination to keep alive the local and indigenous knowledge that underpins cultural roots and a sense of identity. This means that “despite the modern structure, much of the cultural heritage is still retained in China’s contemporary education” (Cheng, 2011, p. 591).

Whether they were aware of the tensions or not, participants tended to prefer the Chinese learning style. They gave two main reasons for this - learning habits and transmission of knowledge. The first reason was that their previous habit underpinned by values and beliefs was so deep-rooted in Chinese students’ learning that the western learning ideas could not influence them significantly. Thus, participants would be unlikely to change their learning behaviours though they had heard of or experienced the western model. *“I think it is about habit”; “I think I am a typical student growing up with Chinese traditional education”; “I follow the traditional model on the whole, because I have been influenced by this model so long that I could not change my learning habits in a short time”*. Although some of the participants hoped to combine the two learning models, they thought that it would be difficult because of the respectful Chinese learning culture. The second reason was that participants emphasized the importance of accumulation of knowledge, and suggested that this was why they preferred the traditional learning model. For example, students said, *“Our learning and teaching model helps students lay a very solid knowledge foundation”; “I think it is necessary, especially when we study foreign languages, foreign cultures, translation skills etc”*. Some of the students elaborated on how basic knowledge was important and claimed that *“I acquire knowledge from teachers as much as possible by following our traditional model ... Each teacher has his own characteristics and different views, so I can get important ideas and a solid knowledge base in the classrooms ... and then develop my own opinions and conceptual systems based on the foundation”*. In the students’ opinions, learning seemed to be

seen as both the increase of knowledge and the abstraction of meaning because they thought that the actual and ultimate goal of education is not only to acquire existing information and to lay a solid knowledge foundation, but also to develop one's own views, and the application of information and conceptual frameworks. That is, the students not only suggested that learning was a process of reproduction of existing knowledge, emphasizing the reproductive nature, but also highlighted an interpretative process, in which learning was regarded as a constructive activity, aiming at an understanding of reality in students' own opinions and conceptual frameworks.

This research result was consistent with five conceptions of learning, which were discussed in my literature review. Saljo (1979) identifies five conceptions of learning. According to the first conception, learning is seen as an increase of knowledge. The conception has similarities with the second one, according to which learning is seen as memorizing. In the third conception, learning is understood as the acquisition of facts and procedures, which can be retained and/or utilized in practice. In the remaining two conceptions, the reproductive nature of learning is replaced by conceptions in which the emphasis is on learning as a constructive activity. According to the fourth conception, learning is seen as the abstraction of meaning and in the fifth conception, learning is understood as an interpretative process aiming at an understanding of reality (cited in Eklund-Myrskog, 1998). The research result was also consistent with the study of Watkins and Biggs (2001), which argues that "teachers in Chinese classrooms produce positive learning outcomes under conditions that western researchers would regard as most unpromising" (p. 277). Saravanamuthu (2008), and Saravanamuthu and Tinker (2008) note that international comparison of educational performance reveals that students from Confucian-heritage cultures tend to outperform western students. Some researchers (Xu, Connelly, He & Phillion, 2007; Xu & Connelly, 2009) find that Chinese students, who were brought up in a context where education tends to be rigid, knowledge-oriented and teacher-centred, turned out to be very successful in English-speaking environments. However, the

research result did not support part of the literature (Marton & Saljo, 1976; Samuelowicz, 1987; Barker, Child, Gallois, Jones & Callan, 1991; Pratt, Kelly & Wong, 1999; Kim, 2009). These studies claim that Chinese students tend to take a shallow approach to learning, and suggest that in the Confucian ideas of learning, “the education systems are mainly oriented towards conserving knowledge, and the learning approach fostered emphasizes the reproductive ability of students” (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991, p. 11).

## **Adaptations of the western model in China**

Students not only critiqued the western model and explained tensions in their minds, but also described the adaptation of the western learning style. Only two participants, S1 and S12, did not talk about adapting the western learning model. However, the majority of the students offered considerable information and valuable insights explaining whether the western model was appropriate to Chinese classrooms or not. Students thought that it was difficult to implement the western model in contemporary China although it had advantages. Here were two reasons: one was the Chinese learning culture; the other was China’s actual conditions.

### **China’s actual conditions**

Some participants mentioned China’s actual conditions including the number of students in each class and the university entrance examination in China. They did not think that China was able to learn from the western learning model since Chinese students faced the pressure of the university entrance examination. They also realized that the number of students in each class in the west was small so that the teachers could communicate with each student easily, while in China, the communication was unrealistic and could not happen because there were a large number of students in a class. As S9 said:

I think it [*the western learning model*] is unsuitable now. We Chinese are all used to our learning model. Maybe someday the western model will be developed in China, but now it is not very suitable, probably only for about

thirty percent of classes. Since there are many students in a class, teachers can't show concern for every student. If they are concerned about each one in a class, teachers can't teach anything at all. But in the west, there are not so many students in a class, and so students can voice their opinions in class. (S9)

Similarly, S3 said that if China used western methods, it perhaps would not work well because Chinese classrooms were full of students. As S3 said:

I think the Chinese method is not as free as the western method is. However, considering the conditions in China, that is, there are so many students in a class, if China also uses the western method, it perhaps will not work well because Chinese students get used to the traditional teaching model. So, if China wants to reform its teaching method, it must do it one step at a time, instead of completely denying its own model. The traditional learning model has been implemented in China for so many years, and must have been suited to China's conditions. (S3)

### **The Chinese learning culture**

The majority of the participants thought that the western model was unsuitable for China today, and they gave more attention to the Chinese learning culture. S4 believed that different cultures lead to different educational systems. S7 thought that Chinese students had inherited the idea of modesty from their parents since they were young, and would not actively speak out in class. As he said:

There is no right or wrong for teaching models or learning methods. It can only be judged as appropriate or not. If the western model was implemented immediately in China, Chinese students may not be as active in classrooms as western students are. Because Chinese students have inherited the idea of modesty from their parents since they were young, and would not actively speak out in class. So it is impossible to implement the western model in China. So it can't be simply concluded that the western model is better than the Chinese one or vice versa. It is an issue about appropriateness. If the western model was completely implemented in China, it might not be appropriate for Chinese students' learning. (S7)

S6 shared her insights on this point:

This traditional teaching and learning model has existed in China for many years. Considering the differences between East and West on this point, even though China wants to introduce the western model, it has to be slow. Change must occur one step at a time. (S6)

In line with this view, S8 reflected on her own learning experiences, and felt that the western learning pattern indeed looked pretty good as western students were more independent, and their learning was based on their interests; in China, students might have their interests, but they did not develop the same learning habits as western students; therefore, even if they were provided with the western learning model, it might not suit Chinese students.

S12, a young woman from the school of Chinese literature, elaborated on how she handled the two learning models in her learning practice. As she said:

I think there is no need to follow the western method as the West has its historical and national characteristics, and its students have their own personalities and habits. On the other hand, we have our own national conditions and characteristics. What's more, we have our own sociality and history. It is not appropriate for us to copy the western learning model completely. We should take on their advantages and make some appropriate changes. (S12)

S5, a young woman from the school of architecture, offered her unique way of thinking; she believed that the traditional Chinese learning model had been developed and existed for so long that it was deep-rooted in Chinese thoughts. However, she claimed that the West and China had already communicated with each other in other areas, and this might produce a good result if the two learning models had more interaction in the future. Then she took the development of Chinese painting as an example:

I think it is impossible today because China has a large population and our traditional learning model has been developed and has existed for so long. But East and West may have influenced or communicated with each other. For example, the drawings of the Song Dynasty (宋朝 960—1279) did not use the

technique of dark and light; however, the drawings of the West were introduced into China, and then, since the Ming Dynasty (明朝 1368—1644), the drawings in China began to use the technique of dark and light. I think a good result will be produced with the collision and communication between China and the West in teaching and learning. But now, I believe our traditional model is still deep-rooted. (S5)

These research materials showed that, when talking about adaptations of the western model, participants tended to think that it was difficult to implement the western model in contemporary China though it had its advantages. Students mentioned China's particular conditions such as the number of students in each class and the university entrance examination, with more attention being given to the Chinese learning culture, and they believed that different cultures led to different educational systems. For example, Chinese students have inherited the idea of modesty from their previous generations since they were children, and would not actively express their ideas in classrooms. Some of the participants explained that there was no right or wrong teaching model or learning method; that it could only be judged as appropriate or not, that if the western model was implemented immediately in China, Chinese students might not be as active in classrooms as western students are. In addition, participants suggested that on one hand, the West had its own historic traditions and national characteristics and students in the West had their own personalities and habits. On the other hand, China had its own cultural values and social conditions. Therefore, although it was possible for the West and China to communicate with each other, it could not be simply concluded that the western model was better than Chinese one or vice versa.

This research result largely concurred with the studies in my literature review, showing that culture provides tools, habits and assumptions that pervasively influence human thought and behaviour, and the task of learning does not escape this influence (Brislin, Bochner & Lonner, 1975; Bruner, 1996; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). Tweed and Lehman (2002) address two terms 'culturally

Western' and 'culturally Chinese'. The features of 'culturally Chinese' are usually thought to follow "the heritage of the Chinese traditional culture, especially that of Confucius" (Wu, 2011, p. 570). This means that Confucian ideas of learning which are somewhat differentiated from other sources of Chinese traditional thoughts such as Taoism, Legalism and Mohism, appeared to be deeply rooted in students' daily lives, to support their learning and to significantly shape/influence their classroom behaviours and practices including consideration for others and the reciprocity of learning, social responsibilities of learning, a pleasure of learning, questioning learning and the goal of becoming good students. When conflicts or tensions occurred in students' encountering with competing western ideologies and learning models, students tended to prefer the Chinese learning culture, which was mainly thought to be based on the Confucian values (Biggs, 1996; Wu, 2011).

However, structural and cultural influences cannot be modeled on hydraulic pressures as "the causal power of social forms is mediated through social agency" (Bhaskar, 1989, p.26, cited in Archer, 2003a, p. 2); unless we accept that structural and cultural factors ultimately emerge from people and are efficacious only through people, then social forms are reified. In other words, as Archer (2003a) argues, constraints and enablements tell us absolutely nothing about which projects are entertained, "the activation of their causal powers is contingent upon agents who conceive of and pursue projects upon which they would impinge" (p. 7). What is required for structural and cultural factors to exercise their powers of constraints and enablements? Archer (2003a) summarises as follows:

Firstly, such powers are dependent upon the existence of human projects; no projects mean no constraints and enablements. Secondly, to operate as either an enabling or a constraining influence, there has to be a relationship of congruence or incongruence respectively with particular agential projects. Thirdly, agents have to respond to these influences; which being conditional rather than deterministic, are subject to reflexive deliberation over the nature of the response. (p. 8)

For Archer, society enters into us, but we can reflect upon it, just as we reflect upon nature and upon practice. Without such referential reality there would be nothing substantive to reflect upon, but without our reflections we would only have a physical impact upon reality (p. 13).

In this study, students' agents enjoy their powers of reflexive deliberation on Confucian values and other competing ideologies. They diagnosed their learning situations, identified their own interests, responded to these influences and designed projects they deemed appropriate to attaining their ends. Students act in undemolished fashion: they confront the world, meaning nature and practice rather than just society, for, as functioning human beings, they feel a continuous sense of the self who does so.

The agent is active, has his or her own distinctive properties and powers, and acquires a sense of self, a personal identity and social identity (Archer, 2003b). Archer (2000) distinguishes between the concepts of the natural self and the social self:

The properties and powers of the human being are neither seen as pre-given, nor as socially appropriated, but rather these are emergent from our relations with our environment. As such, they have relative autonomy from biology and society alike, and causal powers to modify both of them. (p. 87)

In this study, students described and explained Confucian ideas of learning identified in their classroom behaviours and accounts, as well as weighing up or deliberating on the influence of Confucian ideas of learning or the Chinese learning model, compared to competing educational concepts including other Chinese thoughts, and western ideologies or the western learning model in the actual context. They claimed that Confucian ideas and other competing ideologies interact in complex ways in their learning practices, and over time, the competing ideologies would have impact on their classroom behaviours and practices, but Confucian values were the very essence of who they were as people and remained influential for Chinese learners. Students thought that on one hand, constraints and enablements which derive from structural

and cultural emergent properties, have the generative power to impede or facilitate projects of different kinds from groups of agents who are differentially placed; on the other hand, the activation of the causal powers associated with constraints and enablements depends upon the use made of personal emergent properties to formulate agential projects (Archer, 2003a, p. 7).

However, at the same time, in confronting their environment, participants have cares, concerns and commitments which they see as part of themselves, “for they cannot accept the ‘identity’ of demolished men and women; and they have social positions, which most of them would like to rectify, in at least some respect, and are convinced that social improvements merely depend upon discursive changes” (Archer, 2000, p.2). As Wu’s (2011) critical, comparative analysis shows, “the ancient vision of Confucian pedagogy” (p. 571) is completely different from modern assumptions about the Confucian heritage of pedagogy, and “Chinese philosophical concepts and teachings are highly ‘suggestive and creative’, providing significant flexibility, which in turn leaves enough room for situated meaning to be grasped personally” (Feng, 1952, p.14; Wu, 2011, p. 575).

S5, a young woman from the school of architecture took development of Chinese painting as an example and offered her cares, concerns, commitment and uniqueness:

The drawings of the Song Dynasty (宋朝 960—1279) did not use the technique of dark and light; however, the drawings of the West were introduced into China, and then, since the Ming Dynasty (明朝 1368—1644), the drawings in China began to use the technique of dark and light. I think a good result will be produced with the collision and communication between China and the West in teaching and learning. But now, I believe our traditional model is still deep-rooted. (S5)

The student acknowledged that we still experienced conflicts in learning, the living contradiction of self (Whitehead, 1994), and incongruence between

beliefs and practices (Trowler & Cooper, 2002). She thought that Confucian values interacted with competing ideologies that contributed to final decisions. This interaction and decision is ultimately responsible for the reproduction or transformation of society—or a sector of it.

In this part, students weighed up or deliberated on the influence of Confucian ideas of learning or the Chinese learning model, compared to competing educational concepts including other Chinese thoughts, and western ideologies or the western learning model in the actual context. They diagnosed their learning situations, identified their own interests, responded to these influences and designed projects they deemed appropriate to attaining their ends. In particular, students enjoyed their powers of reflexive deliberation on Confucian values and other competing ideologies, and perceived cares, concerns and commitment as part of themselves, because as functioning human beings, they feel a continuous sense of the self who does so.

### **Part 3: Students' identity and agency**

Considering the research results presented and discussed in Part 1 and Part 2, I returned to the literature review and methodology. In Chapter 2, I examined a range of literature including Confucianism as a learning culture, benevolence and self-mastery, *Junzi* and human agency and development of learning conceptions. I sought to investigate students' learning not only from what I know, but from what students do and how they interpret or conceptualize what they do and to examine how students make explanations for their observed classroom behaviors, how their explanations, descriptions and accounts reflect Confucian ideas of learning, and how they weigh up or deliberate on the influence of Confucian values, coupled with other competing ideologies.

In Chapter 3, I explored some theoretical perspectives such as constructivism and hermeneutics, viewed reality as socially/individually constructed and

individually/socially mediated (Crotty, 1998), and believed that the causal power of social forms is mediated through social agency (Archer, 2003a). I employed relevant methods to discover how those constructions occur, how students explain them in different ways, how participants understand the reasons governing why or how they made choices about their learning actions (Stake, 1995), how students, as functioning human beings, place meanings on the events, processes and structures of their lives (Creswell, 2007), in particular, on the Confucian ideas of learning and how intended and unintended consequences produced by students' interactions lead to structural and cultural elaboration, reproduction or transformation (Archer, 2003a).

In the course of presentation and discussion of the research materials, I evaluated the influence of Confucian ideas of learning on students' practices. The power of individual students' agency and that of Confucian values then emerged. The varieties of students' explanations for identified Confucian ideas of learning in their practices, the complexities of deliberations on the influence of Confucian values in relation to other competing ideologies, and in particular, the significant role played by students' identities in dealing with the influences of Confucian values led me to the concepts of human agency and structure (Archer, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2007) in theorizing the phenomena investigated, because this perspective recognizes the interdependence of structure and agency as causal powers at the level of both person and society. That is, agency is implied in a person's way of being in, seeing and responding to the world (Edwards, 2005). It is "a capacity to identify the goals at which one is directing one's action and to evaluate whether one had been successful" (Taylor, 1977, cited in Edwards, 2005, p. 169). It enables us to empirically account for the contexts of people's actions as causally influencing as well as being influenced by those actions (Hopwood, 2010).

is a capacity to identify the goals at which one is directing one's action and to evaluate whether one had been successful.

These elements were not only obvious in previous chapters, but also were perceived to be relevant and useful for my main research question, which aimed to explore to what extent students' classroom behaviors and practices can be explained or understood in terms of Confucian ideas of learning, how students weigh up or deliberate on the influence of Confucian ideas of learning, coupled with other competing ideologies, as well as how students seek to exercise agency in relation to the influence of Confucian values in which they are embedded. In particular, as agents with their own intentions and feelings, participants reinterpret norms and expectations (Lawrence & Valsiner 2003), and "navigate these constraining structures through their own counter-constraining" (p. 728). This means that as functioning human beings, students have their own emergent properties and powers, as well as acquiring a sense of self, a personal identity and social identity (Archer, 2000).

### **The emergence of self-consciousness**

Archer (2003b) maintains that "the most basic of our human powers, beyond our biology, is our 'selfhood' – *a continuous sense of self* or reflexive self-consciousness" (italics original, p. 19). As discussed in Chapter 2, that self "reflects the bounds and conventions of its own history" (Devine & Irwin, 2005, p. 320), and "has in some sense internalized, adopted, become conscious" (ibid, p. 322). From birth, participants emerged into particular ways in the world. A sense of selfhood grew from their existence in the world. For example, S3 reflected on her original learning model, and suggested that she emerged into the traditional Chinese learning model from childhood and knew what she really needed:

I follow the traditional model on the whole, because I have been influenced by this model so long that I could not change my learning habits in a short time. So, in most situations, I attend the classes to listen to teachers and review after class. (S3)

S4 also knew what kind of person he was:

I think I am a typical student growing up with traditional Chinese education. Teachers deliver lectures and I listen to them carefully and take notes. Sometimes I approach teachers after class to discuss some questions. (S4)

A sense of self here is continuous, necessarily reflexive, and derives from students' embodied practices in the world. As Archer (2000) argues, "One of the most important properties that we have, the power to know ourselves to be the same being over time, depends upon practice in the environment rather than conversation in society" (p.7). S9 and S11 explained how they dealt with the two learning models in their own learning practices and how they were the same being over time, and stated that they still prefer Chinese classrooms while finding the western ones appealing. As S11 said:

I acquire knowledge from teachers as much as possible by following our traditional model. I think this is a great benefit for me. Each teacher has his own characteristics and different views, and so I can get important ideas and a solid knowledge base in Chinese classrooms. Then I can read some books, and develop my own opinions and conceptual systems based on the foundation. (S11)

Their dilemmas arose from a clash of two sets of social norms, and emerged at the nexus of their embodied encounters with the world. The final decisions that the students made here were not scripted by society, but resulted from their continuous reflexive consciousness of who they were. That is, the way in which a student attended to an object of learning affected the learning that resulted because the way the student attended to the object of learning was linked to his or her underlying intentions (Kahn, Qualter & Young, 2012 ).

### **The emergence of personal identity**

As human beings we know that we live a rich life: that we are in continuous communion with ourselves and that we engage in a continual running commentary with the events going on around us. We are aware of how our inner lives monitor our responses to external situations in which we find

ourselves and indeed modify some of the circumstances to which we willingly expose ourselves, be these natural, practical or social ( Archer, 2000, p. 193).

In this study, as conscious beings in the world, students inevitably interacted with three different orders of reality with different types of concerns: “physical well-being in the natural order; performative skill in the practical order; and self-worth in the social order” (Archer, 2003b, pp. 20-21). They had to sustain learning and social relationships in order to survive, to live and to thrive in these three orders simultaneously. However, the dilemma confronting all students arises from their concerns originating in each order of reality, which are not necessarily harmonious. While I acknowledged that the research materials did not allow me to locate every participating student’s concerns in relation to each of the three orders of reality, the notion of the cognitive unconscious (Ashwin, 2008) might offer a partial explanation for this matter. That is, each student had to work out a livable balance within a range of concerns in relation to these three orders by prioritizing one or several of them. For example, S4 thought a good student should have all around development of the moral, the intellectual, the physical and the aesthetic. S7 claimed that a good student should not only study well but also have overall development including a good moral spirit and virtue. S3 felt that if one showed his/her bad character, his/her life would be a failure. These students dealt seriously with their concerns about their well-being in the natural order of reality of their particular life cycles. In the practical order of reality, in the research materials, students’ performative skills were evident through exposure to a range of activities such as conforming to the rules of classrooms (S4), alleviating patients’ sufferings (S9), reading architectural history (S5), admitting mistakes (S2), behaving politely (S7), and working hard, being respectful and being a good student. As for students’ concerns about self-worth in the social order of reality, the research materials provided examples of students’ interactions with significant others, offered evidence of students’ concerns or social responsibilities in learning, and showed their reflection on critical incidents that had happened to them. However, “we have no

alternative but to inhabit these three orders simultaneously, and none of their concerns can be bracketed away for long” (Archer, 2003b, p. 21). Students can prioritize one of these three orders of reality but cannot neglect the orders entirely.

Being in a world of various constraints and enablements, students deliberated the relative balance between their varied concerns. At the same time, they also had to confront and negotiate the different ways that the world of realities impinged upon them, and to contribute to the way in which agents both display characteristic patterns of reflexivity and prioritise different sets of concerns (Kahn, Qualter & Young, 2012). This balance among a student’s concerns gave the student his or her identity as a particular person. In relation to learning practice, the participants “played a role in determining which aspects of their practice are of most significance, given the complexity and context-specificity of teaching” (Kahn, Qualter & Young, 2012, p. 866). Thus, students’ identities formulated prior to their study in the university, were neither the gift of the situations in which they found themselves nor the result of influential factors students encountered. They were students’ own concerns which directly influenced their own focus of attention, and reflected their own deliberation and self-awareness for seeking balance in all three orders of reality. They were constructed through “inner conversation” to make sense of what students cared about most and committed themselves to in the world, and, how they shaped their lives around those concerns.

As a result of ongoing interaction with the environment, new sources of information and knowledge came into being. In this research, students interpreted and articulated these imports in the light of their commitments that defined who they were; this might bring with it internal contradictions, transformation of commitments and re-valuation of the past. For example, students in this study varied in their sense of agency as their schooling progressed. Students, like S4, S6, S8, S9 and S12 actually did not have any thoughts when they graduated from high school, did not connect with the

outside world much and knew little about those university disciplines. They had just learned about themselves, the school and the relations around them. They might have had an overwhelming sense of structures impinging on them and how they were to learn about them, and wondered about their degree of autonomy and agency in the university environment. Their inner conversations were unlikely to lead them to the establishment of a stable commitment. They had to engage or suspend aspects of their identity and to take on new aspects as their relationships with the environment changed. Uncertainties and inconsistencies were more likely to happen at this stage of education. When students were at the stage of postgraduate study, the ultimate concerns around which their lives were organized were more stable. They tended to exercise their autonomy more fluently than during their early schooling, and to exceed the norms that had hitherto rationalized their understanding of the structures within which they lived (Devine & Irwin, 2005). This exemplified in the students' accounts related to Confucian ideas of learning and other competing ideologies. For example, students like S11, S10 and S2 elaborated on why they still preferred the traditional learning model, and how it was important for accumulating knowledge and developing an ideological system. Generally, internal conversation was a continuous reflexive monitoring of students' concerns, and the resulting *modus vivendi* never reached a mature certainty. Students' concerns may change from high school to university, undergraduate to postgraduate and relationship to relationship. When the accumulation of circumstances made it difficult to formulate a desired personal identity or new aspects of that identity, some part of the sense of self was absent, causing dissonance or incongruence. This was evident from students in this study who were experiencing a change in their life cycle, who compromised when choosing current subjects, who came to the university from the countryside, or who experienced the learning differences between the West and China. Their commitments, to some extent, were always subject to renewal or revision.

## **The emergence of social (cultural) identity**

Social identity is a matter of “what we care about in the context of appropriate social roles” (Archer, 2003b, p. 23). As demonstrated in the previous chapters, students reflected on Confucian ideas of learning. Their observed classroom behaviors and their relevant explanations meant that they were neither willing to comply with all its embedded structural properties, nor were they ready to accept its emergent properties, let alone unpredictable emergences. They had to deal with their practices as social agents and to deliberate how structural powers affected who they could voluntarily become. S4, S7 and S9 claimed that they had not changed their learning behaviours as they were used to the traditional learning model for a long time. Given the behaviors and relevant explanations, as shown in Part 1 and Part 2, students appeared to have already forged personal and social identities as the ‘being-with-this-constellation-of-concerns’ (Archer, 2003b, p. 22).

In this research, structural and cultural properties could refer to Confucian ideas of learning and other competing ideologies. For the purpose of this research, I viewed Confucian values as a stratum of structure, thus social identity referred to what students cared about in the cultural context with multiple choices. The emergence of students’ social selves in this context occurred at the interface of Confucian values and personal agency. The relational nature of this interaction required independent powers granted to students’ existing and emergent properties, and the reality of structural and cultural properties.

In the interplay between personal agency and structural power, the personal identity and social identity of students were continuously and simultaneously forged; both contributed to the other’s emergence and distinctiveness dialectically. Students evaluated their cultural concerns against other kinds of concerns when ordering their ultimate concerns. Archer (2003b) speculates three ‘moments’ of the interplay between personal identity and social

identity: 1) the nascent personal identity holds sway over nascent social identity; 2) the nascent social identity impacts upon the nascent personal identity; and 3) synthesis between personal and social identity (pp. 23-24).

In the first moment (personal identity holds sway over social identity), when students were confronted with Confucian values and other competing ideologies, they drew on resources of their existing identities to make decisions. They had internal conversations about their experiences of the natural, practical, and social orders of reality. Firstly, students' concerns about their physical well-being in the natural realm including life cycle and schooling stage, contributed to their decision-making. Secondly, students' constant interaction in the practical order provided various skills such as working hard, being respectful and being a good student in particular. Thirdly, as reflexive beings, students deliberated the multiple choices that Confucian values and other competing ideologies passed on to them; they determined how their beliefs could become the locus of their self-worth. Students entered this university or particular learning context with rich resources. Their emergent personal identities acted as a reference for them to choose what they would like to do and how they might fulfill these. S4 was a typical example who drew strongly on his personal identities. Along with the accumulation of practices and continual testing of his personal and social identity, he held firm beliefs about who he was and how he went about addressing concerns in the learning context. Although the full maturation of his identity development was yet to be reached, it seemed that he had no intention of incorporating a possible emergent social-cultural identity into existing ones.

In the second moment (social identity impacts upon personal identity), students underwent changes in the process of formulating their social-cultural identities because they experienced emergent structural properties. Students experienced the learning differences between the West and China. Their choices were necessarily experimental, guided by their personal identities. Voluntary participation and involuntary role-taking in specific contexts might

bring about a confrontation of concerns. Concerns were manifested such as how students identified with the Confucian ideas of learning and other competing ideologies, how they invested themselves, whether they had opportunities to study in alignment with their concerns, or whether they wanted to persist with the learning behaviours for the future. In this process of experimentation, argues Archer (2003b), individuals will have undergone certain subjective and objective changes:

Subjectively, they have acquired some new self knowledge, which will impact upon their personal identity: they are now people who *know* that they are bored by x, disillusioned by y and made uneasy by z. Yet they have also changed objectively, because the opportunity costs have altered for their revised 'second choice' and corrected positions may be harder to come by. (p. 24)

The research materials showed close connections with the 'second moment' of interplay between personal identity and social-cultural identity. For example, six students talked about their struggles to make choices regarding different learning styles. Conflicts and compromises were not uncommon in their accounts. They described perceived enablements and constraints and the benefits they gained and frustration they suffered. S9 and S11 stated that they still preferred traditional classrooms while at the same time finding the western ones appealing. The majority of the students suggested that they had learned from interaction with both the Chinese learning culture and the western one. According to Archer, all these pleasant and not so pleasant experiences contributed to students' subjective and objective changes, and had an impact on their personal identity.

In the third moment of synthesis between personal and social identity, students willingly prepared themselves to invest in the model. They believed that China's teaching and learning style was good for the acquiring of basic knowledge which was useful in the future, and saw their self-worth as constituted by residing in it. Nine students in this study suggested that they had a reasonable alignment with the learning culture, and highlighted the

significance of the Chinese learning style in accumulating knowledge, and in guiding them to comprehensive understanding. They immersed themselves in the cultural context and made contributions to its development. However, this did not mean that personal identity was replaced by social identity because of this alignment. As Archer (2003b) argues, personal identities arise from our citizenship of the whole world; our social identities are made under social conditions that are not of our choosing:

*Our social identity becomes defined, but necessarily as a subset of personal identity. The result is a personal identity within which the social identity has been assigned its place in the life of an individual. (italics original, p. 25)*

As demonstrated in Part 1 and Part 2, students revealed different aspects of Confucian values, and expressed contrasting opinions regarding the western educational ideologies and learning model. This indicated that there were individual differences in agential capacity and structural power. As Archer (2003b) states:

Unless we acknowledge this, we will go far astray by making assumptions that the same constraints and enablements have a standardised impact upon all agents who are similarly placed. Instead, in every social situation, objective factors, such as vested interests and opportunity costs for different courses of action, are filtered through agents' subjective and reflexive determinations. Actions are not mechanically determined, nor are they the subject of a uniform cost-benefit analysis that works in terms of a single currency of 'utiles'. Rather, it is the agent who brings her own 'weights and measures' to bear, which are defined by the nature of her 'ultimate concerns'. (p. 25)

## **Reflexive deliberation and actions in practice**

Archer (2003a) argues that it is through reflexive deliberation that the agency of the individual emerges, their concerns are prioritized, and a particular course of action is determined. The reflexive deliberation undertaken by the participating students was linked directly to their learning notions and practice. Archer (2007) offers an account of reflexivity as "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in

relation to their (social contexts) and vice versa” (p. 4). She further identifies four distinctive forms of internal conversation or modes of reflexivity: a) communicative reflexivity; b) autonomous reflexivity; c) meta-reflexivity; and d) fractured reflexivity. In this study, students mediated the effects of structure upon them, and exercised their agency through reflexivity or internal conversation. The reflexive thoughts of participants exemplified some characteristics of the four modes of reflexivity, and showed that the students were able to conduct internal conversations about individual agency and structural power, as well as the interplay between them.

Communicative reflexivity is a mode often utilized by people whose internal conversations need to be completed and confirmed by others before they lead to actions. Such conversations are seen as dependent on the presence of stable relationships in a context of strong continuity, depending primarily upon sustaining “thought and talk” (Archer, 2003a, p. 209). The demonstration of this mode of reflexivity in this study was the evidence that students proactively sought advice from the people around them, and often shared thoughts with close others or like-minded peers. Students claimed that they needed to learn from their classmates or schoolmates who were knowledgeable and capable. In other words, classmates or peers might be needed to complete the students’ thought or act in a complementary fashion to the students’ reflexive processes. This tended to happen in a collaborative rather than competitive environment, and involved interpersonal relationships. For example, S1 said that she would like to communicate with her classmates, or friends who have rich experiences, and then she could always gain some new things. The better the relationships involved, the broader the discussion topics, the deeper the self-disclosure. Archer (Archer, 2003a) also found the ‘communicative reflexives’ accommodated work by voluntarily reducing their aspirations whenever clashes occurred with the perceived needs of family, and this was evident in the students’ accounts in this study. S9 said that when she was a child, she wanted to be a policewoman. But after one of her family members was ill, she decided to be

a doctor. Students in this mode of reflexivity tended to “share their inner dialogues with others before deciding on a course of action” (Kahn, Qualter & Young, 2012, p. 865). They were active agents, but agents for stability.

Autonomous reflexivity is an internal dialogue within people who do not need or want to exchange ideas with other people. Their inner deliberations are thought to be self-sufficient and they do not need to be supplemented (without being arrogant, as they acknowledge their personal limitations). They sustain complete internal conversations with themselves, leading directly to action. Where there is discontinuity, such people tend to rely upon their own internal resources to make their way in the world and embark on independent courses of action in pursuit of their own concerns. In this study, students demonstrated aspects of autonomous reflexivity. As S3 said:

Using the western model may develop students’ divergent thinking. ... Chinese teachers ... use simple words to make students understand some complicated theories. Foreign teachers may just let students discuss by themselves. But students are greenhorns who tend to acquire knowledge not to criticize knowledge, so they need teachers to guide them to comprehensive understanding. So I feel the western model can’t have the same effect on students as the traditional Chinese model can. Therefore, I don’t think the two models conflict with each other in my learning practice. What we should do is to find the advantages of each model and apply them in practice. If we just focus on the disadvantages of each model, then we would get nothing. As people always say, ‘do not let life fit us; let us fit life’. (S3)

We see here that students engaging in reflexive deliberation knew about and understood their learning culture. They knew exactly what they valued, anticipated constraints, designed their course of action and adopted strategies pursuing worthwhile practice. Students based their actions principally on their own internal conversations, “prioritising performativity in the face of social constraints and opportunities” (Kahn, Qualter & Young, 2012, p. 865). They tended to promote what they cared most about. They are active agents for change.

Meta-reflexivity constitutes people who are critically reflexive about their own internal conversations and critical about effective action in society. They share the same objective discontinuity with the 'autonomous reflexives', but they stand in a different relationship to a given context. They are social critics and idealists, ever "seeking a better fit between who they seek to be and a social environment which permits their expression of it" (Archer, 2003a, p. 259). For example, S7 and S5 exemplified this mode of reflexivity:

I think the classroom atmosphere in China should be more active and make students think divergently. Besides, there should be more communication between students and teachers. (S7)

China has a large population and our traditional learning model has been developed and has existed for so long. But East and West may have influenced or communicated with each other. For example, the drawings of the Song Dynasty (宋朝 960—1279) did not use the technique of dark and light; however, the drawings of the West were introduced into China, and then, since the Ming Dynasty (明朝 1368—1644), the drawings in China began to use the technique of dark and light. I think a good result will be produced with the collision and communication between China and the West in teaching and learning. (S5)

S7 felt that he was critical of his own deliberations and "of what constitutes effective action within society" (Kahn, Qualter & Young, 2012, p. 865) because there was something that he found wanting or undesirable about the given context. S5 took the development of Chinese painting as an example and offered her concerns and uniqueness. Although she believed that the traditional learning model was deep-rooted in Chinese thoughts, she suggested that the West and China had already communicated with each other in other areas (e.g., painting), and that a good result might be produced if the two learning models have more interaction in the future. The two students seemed to challenge the taken-for-granted cultural and social structure, and attempted to want others to share their ultimate concerns. When people in this mode of reflexivity aggregate, they can generate great impetus for social and cultural change (Plumb, 2008).

In the case of fractured reflexivity, people cannot conduct a purposeful internal conversation that is efficacious for addressing personal concerns. Deliberation in this mode tends to intensify personal distress rather than resulting in purposeful courses of action. It is not that the people ceased to engage in internal conversation, but “are those for whom reflexive deliberations characteristically intensify distress rather than result in purposeful courses of action” (Kahn, Qualter & Young, 2012, p. 865). These people withdraw from exercising directional guidance over their own lives. Thus, fractured reflexivity provides little impetus for personal transformation or social change. In this study, little evidence emerged in the research materials of students adopting practice on the basis of fractured reflexivity.

In summary, the research materials in this present study appeared to reveal the extent and nature of Confucian values practised, explained or deliberated by students’ agency in both complex and individual ways. I acknowledge that Confucian values identified in this study were far from exhaustive; that they were not static but subject to change. However, the research materials indicated that Confucian ideas of learning were deep-rooted in students’ practices and thoughts, and remained influential to Chinese learners. The perspectives of structure, agency and internal conversation offered a fresh insight into the phenomena investigated, and theorized the influence of Confucian ideas of learning, as well as the relationships between them and students’ agential projects; this anticipates the conclusions in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: The Confucian sieve now and in the future

The Master said, “To say you know when you know, and to say you do not when you do not, that is knowledge (子曰: 知之为知之, 不知为不知, 是知也).” (Book 2:17, the *Analects*, 2008)

In Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 I examined how existing literature provided a solid foundation for this research project, on which I developed my initial understanding of the influence of Confucian ideas of learning. However, previous investigations of the influence on students’ learning practices and ideas have been rather incomplete in representing the complexities of the phenomena investigated. They did not capture, for example, the relationships between Confucian values and Chinese university students’ classroom behaviours, and between the structural or cultural influence and students’ agency; as well as the interplay between Confucian heritage and other competing ideologies in their learning practices. This study addressed such limitations by offering a more comprehensive understanding of Confucian values; the explanations and accounts which students made about particular Confucian ideas of learning; the interplay between Confucian values and other competing ideologies; emergent properties of the influence of Confucian values; and students’ internal conversations and decisions about the structural or cultural influence, as well as students’ reflections, deliberations and consequent actions.

As presented in the opening chapter, although the existing knowledge about tertiary teaching and learning has been influenced by particular perspectives (McAlpine, 2006), it is important not to be confined to existing interpretations as there may be other equally valuable ways of making sense of the phenomenon in higher education (Clegg, 2007a). Therefore, education researchers should be “willing to draw on knowledge and disciplinary insights that are not confined to the higher education literature... [and] to extend our theoretical vocabularies in order to pose new questions” (Clegg, 2007a, p. 3). I

remained open to different theoretical positions throughout the research process, while avoiding a grab-all theoretical eclecticism. Given the nature of the research questions and research results, as well as the literature reviewed and the methodology employed, the perspective of human agency and structure in social theory (Archer, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2007) became important for making sense of and theorising the phenomena investigated.

The research results illuminated the possible range and features of the influence of Confucian ideas of learning, and students' practices of and deliberations on them. Although I do not claim that the conclusions reached are generalizable in details to other students or to other institutions of higher education, they might help shed some critical light on research in higher education and so move to an even more comprehensive understanding. Readers might be able to generalize findings to their own contexts or similar situations.

In this chapter, I begin by reviewing the previous four chapters. I then integrate research results with the literature and methodology to summarize the development of the research framework. I discuss the incongruence or congruence emerging in this study and draw tentative conclusions. I outline the educational implications of these research results, and offer some recommendations for student development and the environment in which development occurs. I describe some limitations and strengths of the study. I present a reflective account of my own development path as a researcher in this study and the ways in which my own growth has provided an additional lens for considering its results. I conclude with some thoughts about how the research results illuminate what might be anticipated for future studies, which might deal with similar research questions.

## **Review of chapters**

As pointed out in Chapter 1, the purpose of this research was to explore students' understanding of the influence of Confucian ideas of learning, to

examine how Confucian values are reflected in students' ideas and classroom behaviours, how the values shape students' learning practices or influence students, as well as how students understand, weigh up or deliberate on the influence of Confucian values and how students' powers exercise reflexive deliberation on Confucian values and other competing ideologies. The main research question that had guided this study was:

To what extent can students' classroom behaviours and practices be explained or understood in terms of Confucian ideas of learning, and how do students understand, weigh up or deliberate on the influence of Confucian ideas of learning, coupled with other competing ideologies?

Some of the key sub-questions included:

- How do students make explanations for their observed classroom behaviours and learning practices?
- How might these students' explanations, descriptions and accounts reflect Confucian ideas of learning?
- How do students describe or explain different aspects of Confucian ideas in terms of their learning practices?
- How do these Confucian ideas of learning shape/inform/influence students' classroom behaviours and practices?

In the course of addressing these questions, a number of new questions emerged:

- How do students explain and practise Confucian ideas of learning differently over time?
- How do students practise other ongoing and emergent sources of ideologies? What feelings does the interplay between Confucian values and other ideologies evoke?
- What role does students' agency play in determining their ideas of and deliberations on the influence of Confucian values?

As shown in Chapter 2, the literature indicated that students' learning was influenced by one or a set of Confucian values including 'I transmit but do not innovate; I am truthful in what I say and devoted to antiquity' (述而不作，信而好古), and other dialogues between Confucius and his students. However, rather than considering the cultural research of learning, these ideas used by some studies were originally either intended for the temporal structure of learning, or took the philosophical perspective of language to ask what kind of pedagogy is traditionally embraced by language; as for the Chinese learning culture, two contradictory views of students' learning are commonly reflected: either too negative, or too positive. This is insufficient in itself to realize the whole picture of the learning culture as some more aspects are yet to be identified. Research is limited concerning how university students' classroom behaviours and ideas reflect Confucian ideas of learning, how Confucian values shape their learning practices, and how students' agency inwardly understands, weighs up or deliberates on the structural or cultural influence. I situated my study within the existing literature of learning, considering the distinctive features of China's national environment, culture, student characteristics, the uniqueness of China's higher education system and the characteristics of the university. I thus attempted to investigate students' understanding of the influence of Confucian ideas of learning on their practices in a university in the central part of China, a region that is widely regarded as the cradle of Chinese civilization. In this chapter, I tried to adopt a more comprehensive perspective, aiming to explore how students' classroom behaviours and practices could be explained or understood in terms of Confucian ideas of learning, how the structural and cultural values influence students, and how students weigh up or deliberate on the influence of Confucian ideas of learning, coupled with other competing ideologies, as well as to examine the interplay between Confucian values and emerging factors in the era of globalization and students search for the improvement of the self when inconsistent or conflicting 'messages' about learning and education emerged.

As illustrated in Chapter 3, this project was a study of 12 students in a university located in the central part of mainland China. Observation and interview were the primary methods of collection of research materials. I believe that reality is socially/individually constructed and individually/socially mediated, that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting, and that courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of agents who subjectively determine their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances. Within the theoretical orientation, the grounded theory was adopted to guide the different levels of analysis of research materials aiming to construct theory 'grounded' in the collected research materials from the participants' perspective. However, it was neither regarded as a rigid structure nor the only way to follow, but a guide to serve the research purpose. That is, I was open to different perspectives. I adopted grounded theory in initial analysis of research materials to avoid a *priori* theorizing, and to assist my understanding of the non-linear, dynamic and emergent nature of the phenomena investigated. Participants' reviews of transcripts, my presentation of research materials and preliminary research results in my publications, my reflection in and on the analysis, coupled with the involvement of colleagues and researchers in wider communities, made the ongoing analysis process open to public scrutiny, ensuring the trustworthy nature and rigour of this study. So this present study is a social practice aiming to investigate how structural emergent properties impinge upon students and condition their learning as well as how these properties are received and responded to by students in turn, how participants understand reasons governing why or how they made choices about their learning actions, how students, as functioning human beings, place meanings on the events, processes and structures of their lives, in particular, on the Confucian ideas of learning; and how intended and unintended consequences produced by students' interactions lead to structural and cultural elaboration, reproduction or transformation.

The presentation and discussion of research results in Chapters 4 revealed the existence of a range of behaviours and accounts of students concerning Confucian values in their learning ideas and practices. In an attempt to highlight the idiosyncratic nature of participants, as well as the nature of the research materials and of my analytic processes, I presented and discussed the research results to show concrete details in both observations and interviews, to suggest links between the research materials, Confucian ideas of learning and previous literature with specific attention to the findings of studies on Confucian values (e.g., Woods & Lamond, 2011; Zhang, Cone, Everett & Elkin, 2011; Hall & Ames, 1987; Lee, 1996; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Hue, 2008; Watkins & Biggs, 2001), as well as to offer connections with relevant theories. I organized the research results under key headings prescribed by the initial research questions. Thus, in Part 1, five key categories explicitly related to Confucian ideas of learning were explored including consideration for others and the reciprocity of learning (恕), social responsibilities of learning (任重而道远), becoming a good student (君子), pleasure of learning (学而时习之, 不亦说乎), questioning learning (每事问), as well as different aspects of Confucian ideas of learning in terms of students' learning practices. I mainly explored how students made explanations for their observed classroom behaviours, to what extent students' classroom behaviours and practices could be understood in terms of Confucian ideas of learning, how these explanations, descriptions and accounts of students reflected Confucian ideas of learning, and how these Confucian values shaped/informed/influenced students' classroom behaviours and practices, and conditioned their learning.

In Part 2, I presented and discussed the research results regarding students' deliberations on Confucian values and other competing ideologies. Six themes emerged from the research materials: these included comparing Confucian values with other Chinese thoughts, differentiating Confucian values from western ideologies, preferring the Chinese learning culture, critiquing the western learning model, tensions in Chinese students' minds and adaptations

of the western model in China. I highlighted students' ideas and feelings about the influence of Confucian values and of other ideologies, which varied significantly across individuals. I provided evidence that how students weighing up or deliberating on Confucian ideas of learning depended on other ideologies as well as the Confucian values themselves. Such ideologies included Taoism, Legalism, Mohism, Maoism, liberal education and the western learning style. I also identified how some Confucian learning ideas affected students over time, such as their immediate or delayed, temporary or enduring influence on students' behaviours, ideas and practices. The research materials indicated shifts in the influence of Confucian values over time and changes in the weighting of their influence at various stages of students' personal and academic lives. I focused on students' deliberation to examine how Confucian values are received and responded to by students' agents in turn, how courses of action are produced through the configuration of concerns and the reflexive deliberations of students' agents who determine their practical projects in relation to their circumstances.

In Part 3, the varieties of students' explanations for emergent Confucian ideas of learning in their practices, the complexities of deliberations on the influence of Confucian values in relation to other competing ideologies, and in particular, the significant role played by students' identities in dealing with the influences of Confucian values led me to the concepts of human agency and structure (Archer, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2007). This perspective has been demonstrated in recent studies to be relevant to understanding the agency of students, structure powers and relationships between them (e.g., Kahn, Qualter & Young, 2012; Mathieson, 2012; Hopwood, 2010; Pym & Kapp, 2013). I highlighted the connections between the research results and Archer's notions of three orders of reality (natural, practical and social), interaction between the emergence of self-consciousness, of personal identity and of social identity, as well as four modes of internal conversations (communicative, autonomous, meta-reflexive, and fractured reflexive). This perspective allowed me to integrate Confucian values, other competing

ideologies, and students' classroom behaviours, practices, accounts and deliberations into a whole for a better explanation and a more comprehensive understanding, as well as to answer my main research question, which aimed to explore to what extent students' classroom behaviours and practices can be explained or understood in terms of Confucian ideas of learning, how students weigh up or deliberate on the influence of Confucian ideas of learning, coupled with other competing ideologies, as well as how students seek to exercise agency in relation to the influence of Confucian values in which they are embedded.

## **Development of the research framework**

Originally, studies of learning in higher education have focused on students' intellectual development. More recent studies had paid attention to cultural values proposing a link between learning practice and how/what students learn and think culturally. Emerging studies, which have explored the influence of Confucian values on Chinese students' learning, have yielded contrasting findings and contradictory views. As a result, I took the argument a step further. In this study I suggested that learning was a complex activity consisting of multiple dimensions; for current Chinese students' learning, except for awareness of the effect of the hidden Confucian cultural values, it was also related to some other distinctive features such as other Chinese traditional thoughts, China's national conditions, students' characteristics, the uniqueness of China's higher education and the characteristics of the university, as well as emerging and competing factors in the era of globalization. Moreover, the boundaries between these dimensions and features were not clear-cut. Students were unique individuals, and the learning environments were varied and dynamic. Thus, in attempting to document different types of dynamic interaction and process through time in relation to learning situations in higher education, there was a need to step into the unknown (Haggis, 2009), and this continues to be a major focus of educational research. In addition, students' behaviours, ideas and their

practices, as an extension to this focus, offered opportunities for a snapshot of the phenomena.

Then I reviewed the literature investigating students' understanding of the influence of Confucian values on their behaviours, ideas and practices. In doing so, my main purpose was to examine the insufficient coverage of any individual studies when the complex nature of the influence of Confucian values was considered. I did not think that this was a limitation of those studies, because I was aware that researchers might intentionally overlook other domains of the influence of Confucian values by focusing on one particular dimension. For example, Hue (2008) points out that "This article does not depict the full picture of Confucianism. Rather, some main themes underlying this philosophy and some dimensions of key concepts...have been explained" (p. 312); here the author was seeking to understand both explicit and implicit theories in practice. The influence of Confucian values identified in previous studies (e.g., Biggs, 1996; Deng, 2011; Lee, 1996; Shi, 2006; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Woods & Lamond, 2011) provided a solid foundation for this research and helped my analysis of the current research materials. However, the account set out in Chapter 2 required further elaboration to capture the entirety of the phenomena. Some results needed amending and so a more comprehensive illustration of the phenomena was required.

Moreover, previous studies were underpinned by a variety of ideas within the geographical, historical, empirical, comparative, reinterpreted and philosophical perspectives, which enabled researchers to observe and to explain reality in particular ways. Among some of these studies, differences in interpretations of research materials led to different ways of understanding the influence of Confucian values and students' practices. In this study I have been reflexive in relation to my theoretical positions, as I believed that the exploration of theories could assist me to understand the phenomena under investigation and to speculate on some theories that might influence participants' understanding of their reality. I also believed that the theoretical

framework should not be regarded as a rigid structure, but a guide to serve the research purpose (Dobson, 1999). Given the infinite complexity of the phenomena in the real world, there was no one best theory but only different ways of seeing the world, and there might be better theories for different situations.

In addition, there is a body of literature in which human agency and structure are discussed in relation to teaching and research (Devine & Irwin, 2005; Fanghanel, 2007; Fanghanel & Trowler, 2007; Plumb, 2008; Kahn, 2009; Leibowitz, Schalkwyk, Ruiters, Farmer & Adendorff; 2012; Brew, Boud, Locus & Crawford, 2013; Clegg & Stevenson, 2013). However, I have not located much literature in which human agency is considered with specific reference to both personal accounts and cultural practices in relation to learning, in particular, Chinese students' learning. That is, the interplay between the individual student's agency and structural power has rarely been considered, in particular, in mainland China. As Kahn, Qualter and Young (2012) argue, "theories of learning typically downplay the interplay between social structure and student agency" (p. 859). In parallel with the studies, my current research shares research interest with the scholars, turns to an emphasis on the significance of human agency in framing my research, and explores how Confucian ideas of learning shape/inform/influence students' classroom behaviours and practices, as well as how students weigh up or deliberate on the influence of Confucian ideas of learning, coupled with other competing ideologies.

Next, I described the methodology I employed in this research. Although there are distinctions between competing paradigms and ideological positions (Alexander, 2006; Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2003), I circumvented those distinctions by focusing on my research questions. I believe that reality is socially constructed and subjectively determined (Crotty, 1998); that courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of agents who subjectively determine their practical

projects in relation to their objective circumstances (Archer, 2003a, p. 135). I used the methods including observation and interview to discover how those constructions occur; how structural emergent properties impinge upon students and condition their learning as well as how these properties are received and responded to by students in turn; how students, as functioning human beings, place meanings on the events, processes and structures of their lives (Creswell, 2007), in particular, on the Confucian ideas of learning; and how intended and unintended consequences produced by students' interactions lead to structural and cultural elaboration, reproduction or transformation (Archer, 2003a).

After that, I presented and discussed the research results, and two broad domains regarding the influence of Confucian values were identified: emergent Confucian ideas and students' deliberations. The former was presented based on the observed classroom behaviours and students' explanations of them, which could be categorized as pleasure of learning (学而时习之，不亦说乎), questioning learning (每事问), consideration for others and the reciprocity of learning (恕), social responsibilities of learning (任重而道远) and becoming a good student (君子). The latter was presented based on students' understanding of and deliberations on the influence of Confucian values, which could be classified into comparing Confucian values with other Chinese thoughts, differentiating Confucian values from western ideologies, preferring the Chinese learning culture, critiquing the western learning model, tensions in Chinese students' minds and adaptations of the western model in China. In the process of presentation and discussion, the power of individual students' agency and that of Confucian values, and in particular, the significant role played by students' identities in dealing with the influences of Confucian values led me to the perspective of human agency and structure (Archer, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2007) as it offered a better understanding of how students weigh up or deliberate on the influence of Confucian ideas of learning, coupled with other competing ideologies, as well

as how students seek to exercise agency in relation to the influence of Confucian values in which they are embedded.

My emergent appreciation of the relevant theoretical perspective proved to be beneficial in explaining the non-linear dynamic interactions, adaptive orientations, and new properties and behaviours that emerged in the interactions (Morrison, 2008). This means that in this study, since the interaction was non-linear and the emergence of elements was ongoing, uncertainties and confusions were inevitable. During the process of this research, the ongoing development of the research project allows for continuity and change in dynamic systems (Davis & Sumara, 2005; Kuhn, 2008) when students explained and deliberated on the influence of Confucian values; it also enables the focus to shift “from a concern with decontextualised and universalised essence to contextualised and contingent complex wholes” (Mason, 2008, p. 7), which supported my research endeavour to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena investigated. Moreover, participants’ inner conversations were idiosyncratic, and self-contradictions are possible, and so deliberations on the influence of Confucian values were different. Every participant was linked within personal systems, within learning and teaching places, schools, institutional and other larger systems. The direction of participants as well as the situation in which they found themselves could be altered by any changes in the systems and the interaction patterns within participants themselves, between them and others in the systems. However, capturing the entirety was impossible as interaction was dynamic and ongoing. So I concurred with Husserl (1980) that understanding something in its entirety was never achievable. Only partial aspects at a time could be revealed while other aspects might be concealed.

## **Similarities and differences**

Although it is not yet possible to fully develop an understanding of the influence of Confucian values on university learning, the research results in this study revealed that Confucian values were regarded as students’ initial

thoughts or core beliefs. Different aspects of Confucian ideas spilled over into students' practices, and continued to influence their learning, compared to other competing ideologies. In addition, although students' experiences were products of the interplay between Confucian values and other competing ideologies, Confucian ideas of learning were deep-rooted in their daily learning practices (Figure 5.1).

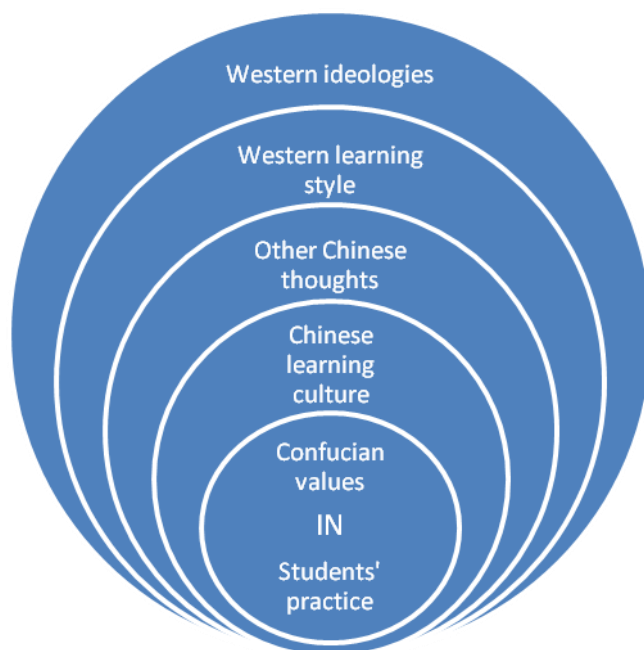


Figure 5.1: Interaction of students' practices, Confucian values and other ideologies

Generally speaking, students' understanding of the influence of Confucian values in this study strengthened the research results of existing literature (e.g. Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Pratt, 1992; Huang, 2011), which regard Confucian values as significant components of modern social-cultural attitudes affecting learning and communication practice in contemporary China.

To be specific: first, students' explanations of being quiet in classrooms implied that Chinese students tended to consider others' feelings. These explanations which included respectful learning, a modest attitude of learning and learning from others, seemed to be in accordance with what Confucius said in the *Analects*, "Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire (己所不欲勿施于人)" (Book 15:24), and echoed my literature review,

which suggests that respectful learning is an important aspect of Confucius' learning (Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1988; Woods & Lamond, 2011).

Second, students' emphasis on social responsibilities and duties in learning, appeared to resonate with Confucius' opinions — "A *Junzi* must be strong and resolute, for his burden is heavy and the road is long (士不可以不弘毅，任重而道远)" (Book 8:7), and was firmly aligned with that part of the literature review which suggests that Confucius has a pragmatic orientation to learning (Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Lee, 1996; Zhang, Cone, Everett & Elkin, 2011); that Confucius perceives learning as unique, complex, and profound, with an aesthetically oriented pragmatic world view (Hall & Ames, 1987).

Third, students' views of being a good student, tended to be consistent with Confucius' suggestion — "The *Junzi* helps others to effect what is good; he does not help them to effect what is bad (君子成人之美，不成人之恶)" (Book 12:16), and supported that part of the literature review (Hue, 2008; Tweed & Lehman, 2002), which suggests that in Confucius' opinion, an ideal person was culturally known as a virtuous person, or *Junzi* (君子); that functioning as an involved agent with others (Wang, 2000), a *Junzi* aims at "helping one connect the inner moral life of an individual to the outward social order" (Hue, 2008, p. 310).

Fourth, students seeing learning as both the increase of knowledge and the abstraction of meaning, somewhat resonated with Confucius' saying "I transmit but do not innovate (述而不作)" (Book 7:1); this was firmly supported by my literature review (Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Liu Baonan 刘宝楠, 1988; Li Zehou 李泽厚, 1996), which argues that Confucius values essential knowledge, and believes that learning is closely tied to hard work; it was also consistent with five conceptions of learning in my literature review (Saljo, 1979; Eklund-Myrskog, 1998), which claim that learning is not only a process of reproduction of existing knowledge, but also an interpretative process and a constructive activity.

Lastly, students' preference for Confucian ideas of learning or the Chinese learning culture largely affirmed the study of Fouts and Chan (1995), which points out that Chinese people attempt to maintain many traditional Chinese values and ways (p. 528), supported the studies in my literature review showing that culture provides tools and habits in learning (Brislin, Bochner & Lonner, 1975; Bruner, 1996; Tweed & Lehman, 2002), and was consistent with the studies (Watkins & Biggs, 2001; Saravanamuthu, 2008; Saravanamuthu & Tinker, 2008; Xu, Connelly, He & Phillion, 2007; Xu & Connelly, 2009), which argue that students who are brought up in a context where education tends to be rigid, knowledge-oriented, and teacher-centred turn out to be very successful in English-speaking environments.

However, students experienced a sense of fluidity of being, uncertainty, ambiguity, dissonance, incongruence, contradiction and compromise in decision-making in their learning practices when they interacted with other educational ideologies/learning models. Experiencing other different ideologies could lead to a practice of encouragement when existing Confucian ideas of learning and practices were affirmed; a practice of seeking balance when other ideologies were various, inconsistent or conflicting with Confucian values; a feeling of attachment or holding to Confucian values and practices when other competing ideologies conflict with them (Figure 5.2).

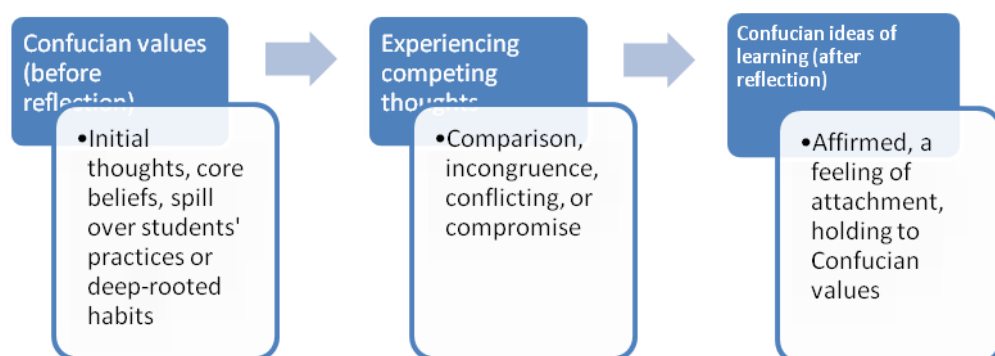


Figure 5.2: Students' deliberation on Confucian values and other ideologies

That is, students acted proactively to reflect on, or influence, or change their traditional learning model. This critical reflection on the structure indicated

that students were active and reflexive agents rather than passive and dependent receivers. With the proactive and reflective stances, at the very start students tended to avoid the impact of other ideologies or to passively accept this impact; to actively reject some aspects of other competing ideologies which they perceived as unacceptable or to make compromises when they tried to negotiate a balance between their core beliefs and other ideologies; to actively adjust personal thoughts and practices to meet the challenge of other competing ideologies or to maintain their integrity with this personal fundamental belief unchanged by taking a defensive or protective stance when they encountered other competing ideologies; to seek opportunities for taking action or to eventually exercise personal agency, attempting to influence other people around them or to proactively take action to influence/change the structure (Figure 5.3):

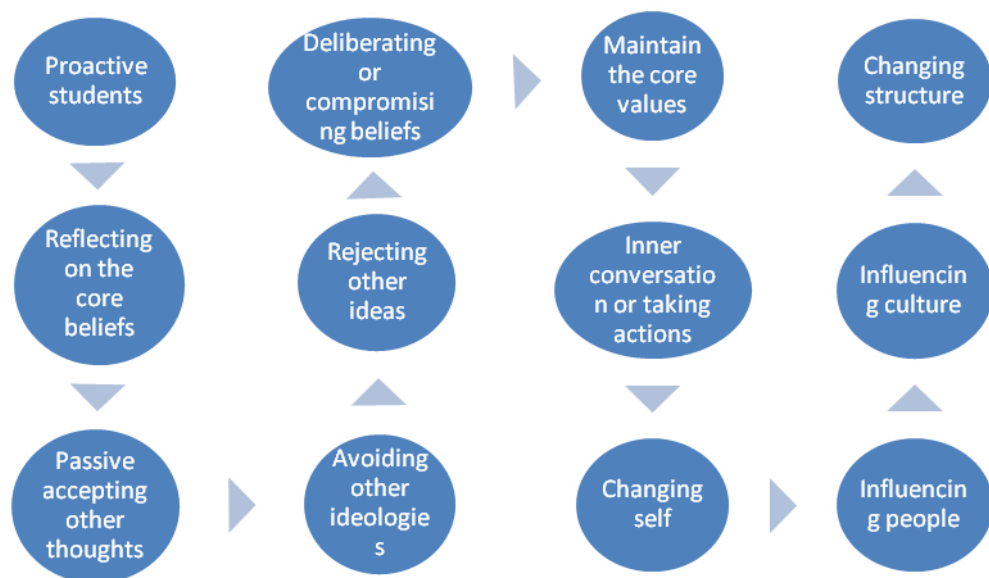


Figure 5.3: Students' self, deliberation, inner conversation and structure

In general, students' explanations or deliberations were a process of inner conversation, through which possible changes and new forms of influence seemed to emerge.

First, students' views of the pleasure of learning resonated with Confucius' sayings such as, "he is the sort of man who forget to eat when he works himself into a frenzy over some problem, who is so full of joy that he forgets his worries and who does not notice the onset of old age (发愤忘食，乐以忘忧，不知老之将至尔)" (Book 7:19); "To be fond of it is better than merely to know it, and to find joy in it is better than merely to be fond of it (知之者不如好知者，好之者不如乐之者)" (Book 6:20); and "Is it not a pleasure, having learned something, to try it out at due intervals (学而时习之，不亦乐乎)" (Book 1:1). However, these views were to some extent overlooked by scholars in my literature review (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Carson, 1992; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Tweed & Lehman, 2002), which recognizes other aspects of Confucius' learning values such as effortful learning, behavioural reform, pragmatic learning, acquisition of essential knowledge, and respectful learning; little attention was paid to Confucius' pleasure of learning.

Second, students explained that questioning learning played a significant mediating role in their learning practices. Their explanations were consistent with Confucius' proverbs such as, "When faced with the opportunities to practise benevolence, do not yield precedence even to your teacher (当仁，不让于师)" (Book 15:36) and "If one learns from others but does not think, one will be bewildered. If, on the other hand, one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be imperilled (学而不思则罔，思而不学则殆)" (Book 2:15). However, this did not completely support the studies of some scholars which claim that Chinese students are passive in learning, follow authorities, and lack critical thinking (Kennedy, 2002; Murphy, 1987; Carson, 1992), and that Chinese students learn by imitating others rather than by independent thinking, and rely heavily on memorising or rote learning (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Carson, 1992; Carson & Nelson, 1996).

Third, students said that they knew little about some western educational ideologies. This was inconsistent with that part of the literature review (Mok, 2005; Tang & Wang, 2009; Gao, 2010), which points out that like elsewhere

across the world, the western terms of ‘academic capitalism’, ‘neo-liberal’, and ‘entrepreneurial universities’ were becoming increasingly popular in shaping the higher education sector in China. Likewise, what the students asserted did not support my literature review (Panel of the Outline, 2010; Liang, 2007; Zhang, 2007), which suggests that the Chinese government is widely implementing ‘general education’ or ‘liberal education’ for broad knowledge, transferable skills and personal enrichment. This might be in relation to the nature of this university, which was considered to be situated in one of the more backward areas in contemporary China.

Fourth, students reflected on tensions in their minds as they reconciled Confucian traditions, Maoist ideas and western ideas. This has not previously been spelled out clearly in relevant literature (Ames, 2003; Biggs, 1996; Cheng, 2011; Cheng & Xu, 2011; Deng, 2011; Fouts, & Chan, 1995; Hue, 2008; Lee, 1996; Shi, 2006; Song, 2012a; Wu, 2011), though some studies suggest that “There is a relatively common Chinese culture directed for centuries by Confucian values underlying much of the country, and most recently influenced by Mao and his teachings” (Fout & Chan, 1995, p. 524).

However, when confronting their environment, students (e.g., S5, a young woman from the school of architecture) claimed that the West and China had already communicated with each other in other areas (e.g., painting), and that a good result might be produced if West and East have more interaction in the future. This means that students, functioning as human agency, have their cares, concerns and commitment: conflicts in learning, the living contradiction of self (Whitehead, 1994) and incongruence between beliefs and practices (Trowler & Cooper, 2002) contribute to final decisions, which are ultimately responsible for the reproduction or transformation of society—or a sector of it (Figure 5.4).

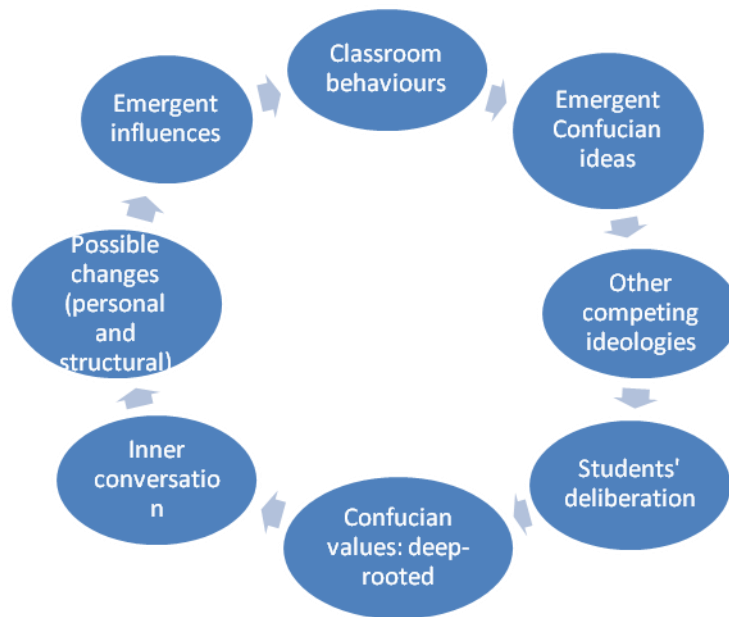


Figure 5.4: A continuing cycle of emergent influences

## Challenges

As described in Chapter 2, the aim of the study was to investigate what students do and how they interpret or conceptualize what they do in classrooms, because the relationship between the classroom behaviours and Confucian values, the interplay between Confucian values and other competing ideologies, as well as students' deliberation on the relationship and interplay had previously received little attention.

Given such features, I was challenged to present and to discuss the research results in a comprehensive way. I realized that understanding something in its entirety was never achievable. Only partial aspects at a time could be revealed while other aspects might be concealed. Attention must also be paid to the fact that the answers to the research questions presented in the preceding section were derived from an in-depth investigation of a limited number of students who studied in one particular university in mainland China. It followed, therefore, that it was not appropriate to generalise research results uncritically outside of these parameters. At the same time,

however, it could reasonably be inferred that particular research results and their associated implications might well have a more general applicability.

## **Implications**

In this study, it can be seen that certain Confucian values such as benevolence (*Ren* 仁) and a *Junzi* (君子) are as emphasized in students' accounts today as they have been in the history of Chinese society. It can be seen that in practice, students are inevitably influenced by Confucian ideas of learning, although they have encountered other competing ideologies, and have been able to identify with the western learning model. This belief still provides a crucial reference to how students behave in everyday classrooms, and how they learn in their practices. For example, as this study showed, students prioritized the reciprocity of a Confucian learning principle — consideration for others; they highlighted the importance of a pleasure of learning and questioning learning; they emphasized their social duties and responsibilities, and reflected on the tensions in their minds as they reconciled Confucian traditions, Maoist ideas and western ideas.

Though the relatively small sample means that I cannot claim to provide the breadth of research materials that would represent the practices of university students in China, the study can nevertheless provide valuable insights into how they practise, explain and deliberate on or weigh up the influence of Confucian values on their learning, as well as how they negotiate the challenges confronting them in their practice. These insights have implications for other students, for university teachers/learning supporters, and for leaders, policy makers and managers of institutions, faculties/schools and departments.

### **Implications for students**

This research provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their individual practices in their environment, to voice their concerns, and to realise their vision by unearthing the influence of Confucian values on their

learning ideas, behaviours and practices. As one participant said at the end of interviewing, “*I felt this interview gave me an opportunity to reflect on myself and to communicate with others, which gave me the opportunity to learn a lot*” (S8). Reading other students’ stories and narratives can be useful as a vehicle of change, but only if we help students reflect on how their values are, or might be, realized in practice.

In the world, changes often happen, and students might be exposed to ideas that problematise their current practice in some way. It is important for students to take the time to consider why they do what they do now, whether or not this is still important and what really drives their practice. Such awareness refers to the pleasure of learning, Confucius’ idea of benevolence (*Ren* 仁) and Foucault’s self-mastery, as mentioned in Chapters 2 & 4, which recognize the inescapability of desire and the necessity of pleasure in a new body politics, and means “the progressive consideration of self, or mastery over oneself, obtained not through the renunciation of reality but through the acquisition and assimilation of truth” (Foucault, 1988, p. 35; Besley, 2005, p. 372). This awareness also refers to students’ reflections on the tensions in their minds, Confucius’ idea of the *Junzi* (君子) and Archer’s human agency, which acknowledges that students’ agents enjoy their powers of reflexive deliberation on Confucian values and other competing ideologies, and acquire a sense of self, a personal identity and social identity (Archer, 2003b). This kind of personal ability would support students to take account of their environment, to articulate implicit assumptions, and to work out what they as an individual can do to make things better for themselves and for others. This research may encourage other students to assess or increase their sense of self-mastery and self-efficacy, and to enhance their agential power.

## **Implications for teachers/learning supporters/policy makers**

The research results may help teachers/learning supporters understand the influence of Confucian values on their students, and how they might practise and deliberate on or weigh them up. Teachers/learning supporters might become mindful of the realities of students' everyday behaviours/practices, develop realistic learning development agendas, and design thoughtful approaches for working with students. With better understanding of students' learning environments and appreciation of their sense of agency, learning supporters may gain insights into students' learning practices in which culture, or tradition does provide tools, habits, and assumptions that pervasively influence students' ideas and behaviours; Confucian values are indeed deeply rooted in students' daily lives, and significantly shape/influence their learning practices. Teachers may also gain insights into students' inner conversations in which students' agency continually assesses whether the concerns they were once devoted to are worthy of ongoing devotion, how they make their way through the world, and how they make a place in the world – a place where they hope they can exercise some governance in their own lives and become the person they wish to become, within the social world available to them (Archer, 2000).

Thus, for university teachers/learning supporters, policy makers and others attempting to improve the quality of learning, the key implications of this study revolve around the need for greater understanding of the lives of individual students in the university. For example, the research results indicated that Confucian values pre-existed and were deeply rooted in students' early and later learning and socialising, and were reinforced by daily recurrent practice. Their accounts also provided evidence of the ways in which students behaved in class, explained, and deliberated on or weighed up the structure. The research results showed that participants were not necessarily overwhelmed by imported elements from foreign cultures. To a

large extent, the students involved in this study demonstrated the continuing relevance of some traditional cultural beliefs and practices, irrespective of the intensity of external changes or how vigorous attempts had been to transform local culture. It could be inferred that when reflecting on the tensions in their minds regarding reconciliation of Confucian traditions, Maoist ideas and western ideas, participants seemed to resist some broader cultural influences in order to retain what they valued collectively in their own culture (Hue, 2008).

However, considering the multiple discourses or competing ideologies individual students had in and outside the university, any attempt to impose a dominant discourse was likely to result in failure. To put it another way, although this study had found that some aspects of Confucian values still served as the foundation of Chinese university students' ways of thinking, this did not mean that their learning practices could be stereotyped into certain static patterns influenced solely by Confucian values. Neither was it the case that the wider context in which Chinese culture operates, including the impact of western ideology and economics, had no influence upon them. In mainland China, as elsewhere, society has experienced a process of cultural transformation that continues today. University students have inevitably been influenced by such changes.

The research results indicated that there is no one definitive conception of best learning practice in the views of student. This means that the results did not imply that there is a single best way in which practice should be performed and that students should be modifying their existing practice accordingly. 'Best practice' fails to recognise that there are multiple ways of understanding and achieving an objective. As one participant said, "*There is no right or wrong for a teaching model or learning method. It only can be judged as appropriate or not*" (S7). It also fails to consider the complex web in which learning is situated, not only in relation to factors such as teaching

characteristics and departmental characteristics, but also in relation to the personal characteristics of the student as an individual agent.

### **Implications for teachers/managers in other countries**

The research results of this study have wider relevance for teachers not only in schools in China, but also in other countries where learning supporters and teachers are working with Chinese students. The research results suggest that the implementation of university policies regarding students' development, such as study skills support and teaching pace should be made culturally relevant, especially where the target groups of students come from a Chinese cultural background. As many studies have suggested, individuals' accounts of the psychosocial aspects of 'self' differ according to their cultural background, even though human beings may share a fundamental psychological structure. With this recognition in mind, learning support should be based on ideas and practices indigenous to the culture which Chinese students have inherited. It is therefore necessary for teachers/managers to have a conceptual understanding of Confucian values held by their students, and to become aware of how this local and dominant culture influences students' ideas, practices and classroom behaviours. It is equally important to readdress the cultural values underlying current practices of Chinese university students. In doing this, it is possible for teachers/leaders to develop culturally responsive approaches to teaching and culturally competent practices of learning. For example, a lecturer may need to make certain modifications regarding their views of teaching and goals of learning when they have Chinese students in classrooms.

Thus, the results did not imply that a sort of cultural relativism about best teaching practices should prevail, but suggested a pedagogic spirit of compromise and adaptation. The results provided learning supporters in other countries, for example, European teachers, with a way of thinking, and a way of listening to what students say. It might be beneficial for western

teachers to be aware of these cultural influences, and to accommodate students who have a similar cultural Chinese background.

## **Limitations and strengths of the study**

It is important to note that I make no claim to have captured all aspects of the practices of each participant. I purposely avoided, in some interviews, asking leading questions about the influence of Confucian values which had been found in the literature or talked about by other participants, such as the historical development of Confucianism in China and the social, political or cultural influence of Confucian beliefs on students. I assumed that what they brought to the foreground was considered to be relevant, reflecting their interest and sense of what was important to them, at least at that particular moment. What I portrayed, however, matched remarkably well with students' explanations and understandings of the influence of Confucian values on their learning at the moment of interview, and their recalled practices and deliberations. I gave participants opportunities to review and to amend the transcripts. However, there might/must be other explanations and deliberations worth further exploration, and this was beyond the reach of this study.

In this study, time limitations resulted in my not being able to explore changes over a period of time. While every effort was made to nurture appropriate researcher-participant relationships, and to engage participants to reveal insights, more interviews and observations might have yielded richer data. These might have provided me with understandings about other facets of university students' ideas, behaviours and practices; while the study identified Confucian ideas of learning in students' practices, the duration of the study did not allow me to define perceptual change experienced by the participants. However, as the research progressed, the improvement in my interview skills and my enhanced comprehension of university students' learning, to some extent compensated for this limitation.

It must also be acknowledged that the specific methods of collection of research materials and analysis procedures used in the study had limitations as well as strengths. First, these methods enabled me to gather first hand information about classroom behaviours and relatively accurate explanations from the participants and to check whether the meaning derived from their explanations accorded with the meaning the students themselves had in mind. Second, the study also made it apparent that these procedures could never be entirely free of problems or limitations. This followed from the fact that the researcher could never take into account and directly control all of the conditions that might potentially influence the completeness and accuracy of the information about students' behaviours and explanations, as well as the researcher's own assignment of meaning to the students' statements.

A further limitation regarding participants in this study was the size and composition of the sample. While the sample size meant that handling the associated data gathering and analysis presented a realistic and reasonable workload, and the sample size did conform to requirements for saturation based on research materials collected, there were inevitably other aspects that remained unrevealed; further insights might have been gained from a more substantial sample. The requirement for voluntary participation might also have impacted on the sample composition. It was more likely that those who accepted my invitation and were willing to share their ideas and practices brought some predispositions toward learning, which might not be held by other students in similar situations.

Another limitation was tied to my cultural identity as mentioned in Chapter 1 and the typical university context as discussed in Chapter 3. When I attempted to understand university students, their ideas and practices were not presented to me "as they are", but rather "as they are to me". All understanding might be biased according to my perspectives. My pre-understanding of Confucian values shaped the research process, and therefore it could not be thought of as absolutely unbiased. The unknown aspects of myself as a researcher and those being researched limited the

process of ‘fully understanding’ the phenomena. In this research, I was not seeking an ‘objective’ reality, which might exist or have existed; reality could only be ‘recreated’ rather than being ‘accurately represented’. I was interested in the individual ideas and practices, and in the subjective realities they created which could provide material for my interpretation and analysis. It was always in my mind that my interpretations in the study were not the only possible interpretations of the data collected. They were based on my existing knowledge, educational and working experience, and my social-cultural viewpoints. However, the resonances the study had with fellow students and researchers, and its ability to create an understanding of university students, were important indicators of the success of the research.

Also, due to the typical features of the university context, the influence of Confucian values on how students made sense of their practices might be more obvious than in other universities as the province in which the university was located, was the birthplace of Chinese civilization with over 5,000 years of history, and considered to be one of the more backward areas in China compared to other eastern provinces. This might be caused by how the university reacted towards changes initiated internally or externally by government educational policy and other professional bodies. These changes would be likely to exert an impact on the behaviours and practices of students.

## **My growth as a doctoral researcher**

In the study, I spent significant time reflecting on my own development towards becoming an academic/researcher, and my responsibilities to my participants, advisors and myself. For example, when I listened to the audio recordings of the interviews and read the transcripts, I sometimes felt embarrassed about the questions I asked, and the interruptions I made. I believe that I would have done it better with my current understanding of the topic and the interview skills that I have fine-tuned throughout the research and other collaborative projects. In another sense, while acknowledging my naïveté, I was proud of my courage at that stage of my life. In my more recent

years, I would say that the experience of doing my doctoral research influenced me as an interviewer, a researcher, a writer and as a person.

This doctoral experience served to encourage an interest in 'theoretical considerations', which helped me to develop a capacity for critical analysis and reflection in relation to my own values and beliefs and their bearing on my learning practice. Hence I gained the capacity to perceive and interpret the world from a range of perspectives, thus acquiring a deeper understanding of the phenomena influencing students' lives and my own. For example, during the writing period, I found that it was in the process of writing that meanings emerged. Writing brought about reflection on my reading, action and thinking in relation to my research. In some circumstances, language failed to express what I was thinking. So it was not uncommon for me to go back to the literature and my notes when I needed to find the right structures, sentences, or words compatible with my thoughts.

Being new to the research area, I valued hearing the experiences of other researchers which revealed the dynamics of inquires and processes. I benefitted from university postgraduate symposia, faculty postgraduate mini-conferences, school research seminars, and postgraduate information sharing and writing support groups. Interaction with other doctoral/postgraduate students challenged my assumptions and concerns with the theoretical application and analysing approaches, opened up new windows, and enabled me to understand the multiple realities constructed by each researcher and different ways of perceiving the same phenomena and conducting the same research. Working with experienced researchers allowed me not only to improve my skills and understandings through research practice, but also to develop my understandings of philosophical literature. Supervision was also an invaluable source of support and affirmation when I felt overwhelmed by the vast and deep sea of knowledge, struggling to see what was the most relevant to my research questions.

During the journey of doctoral study, I experienced fluctuations of emotion throughout the research process. I sustained the continuity of my doctoral study while experiencing the death of my father, negotiating my roles as mother, wife, daughter, teacher and student, moving and travelling from New Zealand to China, and going through the highs and lows of life. In particular, there were times my thoughts were always with my daughter far away in Australia, whom I had to leave behind. Rather than distracting me from the research, I felt that I understood my participants better by looking through these experiences which resonated with their own experiences. When one participant talked about choosing medicine as her university subject for the sake of a family member, I understood how it felt. When one talked about his/her tough journey of schooling under the pressure of family poverty, I could also understand those feelings.

However, despite the challenges I encountered along the research journey, I felt excited about the resonance between my thoughts and my readings. I was pleased with the end result. In addition to completing this doctoral report, I gained confidence in my ability to conduct and to report research. The challenges I encountered broadened my repertoire of research theories and practices. I was also aware that this PhD was a stepping stone into a research career. My capacity for independent and critical thinking was raised and developed throughout the journey and was demonstrated in the presentation of this thesis. More sophisticated work is yet to come and the skills required to handle higher level research are yet to be obtained through practical investigation and reflection. Reflecting on some of the challenges will support me in planning and conducting further research.

## **Future research**

Although it opened up a rich field of inquiry into learning in higher education, this research only partially uncovered the influence of Confucian values on university students' ideas, behaviours and practices of learning. To help the university develop culturally responsive approaches to learning, I was

therefore left with a set of possible areas to explore further, rather than a set of conclusions.

At an individual level, some Confucian ideas of learning that emerged from the students' explanations, descriptions and accounts are worth being studied further, such as pleasure of learning (学而时习之, 不亦说乎), questioning learning (每事问) and the concepts of benevolence (*Ren*, 仁) or being a *Junzi*, (君子). To be sure, Confucius was concerned with maintaining an orderly society, and consequently his views of teaching and learning were conservative (Fouts & Chan, 1995). In Confucian views, learning was seen as the sole means for advancement within society. As described by participants in this study, those who had been successful were to be respected. This limits life chances for failures to enter higher education. On the other hand, the teachers were purveyors of the knowledge dictated by tradition to be true and valuable. This respect extended to teachers who were given great authority over their students. In my research, what participants did in their classrooms and what they said in their interview means that since what was to be learnt had already been decided, questioning teachers in class was not encouraged and could be seen as disrespectful.

These facets of Confucianism (lack of possibilities for less able learners, perhaps too much respect for teachers and a concomitant lack of questioning or student initiative) may be seen as shortcomings, or they may be seen as appropriate for their time and place. It cannot simply be concluded that these aspects of Confucian learning ideas were 'bad' teaching practices. Confucius might have his own normal shortcomings in relevant areas, but he still acknowledges value of education. As one student from the school of medicine (S7) says, "There is no right or wrong for teaching models or learning models. It can only be judged as appropriate or not." It is an issue about appropriateness. At the global time, this is particularly necessary since it is becoming clear to teachers/learning supporters that in the practice of learning, the philosophical and cultural orientation of a student should be

taken into account. This is not only because “such orientations and values will have an obvious influence on the student in his or her search for the improvement of the self” (Hue, 2008, p.314), but also due to the way of Confucian learning — from being, understanding and naming, and for the harmonization of living, knowing and speaking (Wu, 2011). When the world is heading towards modernization, and when globalization is unifying the area of higher education, what learning would university students hope for? This is a question for further investigation.

At a university level, more research could be done to explore how Confucian ideas of learning influence students in such areas as course design and objectives, harmonious interpersonal relationships, and ways of dealing with academic authorities. For example, the course of ‘moral education’, there have been widespread appeals around the world to increase the weight of learning in the affective domain (Cheng, 2011). For Confucius, learning is a constant modification of self by day-to-day engagement towards a *Junzi* (a good person), a process of gradually becoming moral and knowledgeable (Wu, 2011). The Confucian notion of a *Junzi* is “a matter of holistic personality that requires a comprehensive and all-round cultivation with little of a calculated formula or curriculum for the upbringing of such a perfect person” (Cheng, p. 596).

A prime concern of Confucian education was to develop citizens who conformed to the ideal Confucian duties and responsibilities and who acted and behaved in a prescribed manner (Fouts & Chan, 2006). The emphasis on virtue in Confucian values seems to be providing a useful practice because it reflects more honestly the true nature of human learning; there is also a tendency in contemporary societies to “shift from an analytic, structured, and bureaucratic paradigm to more holistic, flexible, and fuzzy ways of thinking” (Cheng, 2011, p. 598). If education indeed follows this shift, then would Confucian ideas of learning resume their position in China?

At national/international levels, it would be useful to look more closely at how students reflected on the tensions in their minds as they reconciled Confucian traditions, Maoist ideas and western ideas, and how Confucianism and other Chinese philosophies affect learning within various aspects of schooling, including national curricula and whole-state arrangements for education. Since the breach with Chinese traditional culture, which were the outcomes of the Great Cultural Revolution, contemporary China has been undergoing a 'cultural craze' (文化热) and a 'national studies craze' (国学热). These crazes have reignited and revived the long-standing debates about Chinese traditions. However, "we have still to figure out what traditions we are living with" (Cheng & Xu, 2011). Gan (2007) states that there are three traditions permeating Chinese people's lives: *Deng Xiaoping* (邓小平)'s tradition, *Mao Zedong* (毛泽东)'s tradition and the Confucian tradition. With reference to the cultural debates mentioned earlier and within the current movements of modernization and globalization, university students in China have to deal with three cultural or even political forces including Chinese traditional cultures dominated by Confucianism, western ideologies and orthodox Marxism pertaining to Chinese socialism (Cheng & Xu, 2011). In this research, I put more focus on Confucian values and western ideologies. In fact, undoubtedly, Marxism is positioned as politically and culturally predominant in mainland China, and is a political and cultural mechanism which weighs what is positive or negative, higher or lower in Chinese traditional cultures and western discourses. What is learned and how it is learned are not neutral and disinterested, but reflect the values and interests of the powerful (Young, 1971; Cheng & Xu, 2011).

On the other hand, although modernization and efforts by *Mao Zedong* and succeeding Communists have tempered to some degree elements of Confucian society, Confucian thought still provides a powerful ethos within modern China. For centuries Confucianism provided an ideological framework that told people how they were to live, and how to live a good and moral life. Basically Confucianism defined what it meant to be Chinese and defined

Chinese culture. As Fouts and Chan (2006) argue, Confucianism has survived and absorbed both physical and intellectual invasions, and for over two millennia it has been a conservative force in China. In other words, although Confucianism was regarded as a kind of resistance to Maoism or western influences, it is not a total rejection, but a 'sieve', as well as a mechanism for assessing values and deciding what to accept or reject.

Western models are also heavily criticized by scholars in the West. Jerome Bruner, for example, as a leading thinker in education in the US, made a distinction between 'computational' and 'cultural' orientations in education. In his *The Culture of Education* (Bruner, 1996) he refers the former to 'information-processing' and the latter 'meaning-making'. Therefore, it is a historical mission to find a learning culture for Chinese education which is trapped in the battle amongst Marxism, Confucian tradition and western ideologies. This remains a rich focus for future research.

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## Appendix 1 Participants Information Sheet



### **Date Information Sheet Produced:**

21 July 2010

### **Project Title**

The influence of Confucian values: University students' understandings of classroom behaviours and learning practices in contemporary China

### **An Invitation**

My name is Jinhua Song and I am currently enrolled in a doctoral programme at AUT University. My doctoral project focuses on influences on university students' learning. You are invited to take part in the project by contributing to a series of interviews about your reflection on your learning practices and classroom behaviours and to what extent these may be influenced by ideas from Confucius.

Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the process before the data collection process is complete on xxx date, xxx month xxx year. In addition, you are free to ask that any of the information that you have given not be used.

### **What is the purpose of this research?**

This study seeks to consider how students at a Chinese University make explanations for their observed classroom behaviours and practices of learning, how these explanations, descriptions and accounts of students reflect a Confucian tradition of learning, and how these Confucian related ideas of learning shape/inform/influence students' classroom behaviours and practices. In particular, this research intends to identify Confucian related ideas in students' accounts, and attempts to describe the possible influences of such underlying ideas on students' learning behaviours and practices in their everyday classroom lives.

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

In this study, I will select participants who have different backgrounds with respect to their disciplines, their experience as a university student, and their conditions of appointment. Overall, I will be talking to 20 students who are willing to take part in the project and I am making initial contact with prospective participants through my existing networks as well as those of my friends and colleagues.

**What will happen in this research?**

Your participation will include being observed in your classrooms. I will sit at the back of the classroom and will observe your practical learning behaviours. I will take notes or video-taped on your learning activities.

After the observations, I will ask if you are willing to engage in an individual interview. If you agree, you will be interviewed up to six times over a course of ten months from February to November 2011. Each interview will last 60 to 90 minutes and each interview will be audio recorded. The time and duration of the interviews will be arranged to your convenience.

After the individual interview, I may also ask if you would like to part of a focus group interview. The focus group interview will be up to six participants with similar background. It will be conducted to get a variety of data growing out of discussion with other participants. Unlike individual interviews, as a participant in a focus group, you will get to hear others' responses and to make additional comments beyond your own responses or awareness as you hear what other people have to say.

**What are the discomforts and risks?**

There are no intended discomforts or risks in this research. However, although every effort will be made to avoid such circumstances, I acknowledge that discussion of some learning behaviours and practices could still potentially be an issue of professional discomfort for some people being interviewed.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

I will ask questions in appropriate ways to avoid possible discomforts and you may terminate the interview at any stage or choose not to answer some questions. Your

identity will be protected at all stages of the research. The only individuals who will actually listen to the audio tape will be myself, and potentially someone who is asked to transcribe data. Your identity will remain confidential with me at all times and any people involved in the project such as transcribers will have to sign confidentiality agreements and will not be made aware of your personal identity. My supervisors will only see the transcripts and not listen to the tapes.

### **What are the benefits?**

This project intends to provide insights into Confucian heritage of learning that influences the everyday lives of university students and their continuing development. By participating in the project, you are likely to benefit from opportunities to reflect upon your own underlying beliefs, assumptions, and experiences that shape your own learning and growth as a university student. You will also have opportunities to learn about and from the experience of other students who will be participating in the study and how they experience the influences on their learning lives.

### **How will my privacy be protected?**

Your anonymity, privacy and confidentiality will be protected. No names of participants will be used in reports on the research: pseudonyms will be utilised instead. Furthermore, any identifiable personal information will be deleted to ensure privacy and confidentiality. The interviews will be tape-recorded. Tapes will be transcribed using numbers only to indicate speakers.

I will give you a copy of transcript of each of your interviews to review. You will have the opportunity to delete, clarify, or amend any statements that, on reflection, you would prefer not be included as data of the study.

Original data and consent forms will be stored separately in locked cabinets in my supervisors' office at the School of Education of AUT in New Zealand. All original data will be destroyed by shredding after six years.

### **What are the costs of participating in this research?**

There are no financial costs in this research project. However, I do understand that each participant will be giving up some precious time in order to contribute to this

project. Each interview will take approximately up to ninety minutes. Time variations may be necessary as some topics may take more or less time than anticipated. It is important to know that the interview will not extend beyond this time unless with your consent. There are no other anticipated costs or inconveniences related to this project.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

Your participation is voluntary though I hope you will agree to take part in this research as you are likely to find your involvement interesting and rewarding. Please take one week or so to consider your potential involvement as an interviewee participant. If you are interested in participating in this project please reply to me by email [songjinhuahh@hotmail.com](mailto:songjinhuahh@hotmail.com) or call xxxxxxxxxx by dd/mm/yyyy.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you agree to participate in this research, please complete a Consent Form, which will be sent to you by email. I will ask you to sign it and give it to me when undertaking our first interview.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

You will be informed where to get a final report of the project and each participant will be sent an electronic version of the final report as requested. You will also be informed of any future publications concerning the findings of this project.

**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, Dr. Nesta Devine, [nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz), 0064-9-9219999 ext 7361.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEK, Madeline Banda, [madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz) , 0064-9-921 9999 ext 8044.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Jinhua Song

Email: [songjinhuaah@hotmail.com](mailto:songjinhuaah@hotmail.com)

Phone: 0086-371-67781195

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

Dr. Nesta Devine

Email: [nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz)

Phone: 0064-9-219999 ext 7631

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 April 2011, AUTEK Reference number 10/199.**

## Appendix 2 Consent Form for Interviews



Project title: **The influence of Confucian values: University students' understandings of classroom behaviours and learning practices in contemporary China**

Project Supervisor: **Dr. Nesta Devine**

Researcher: **Jinhua Song**

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated dd mmmm yyyy.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes  No

Participants' Signature:.....

Participants' Name:.....

Participants' Contact Details (if appropriate): .....

Date: .....

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 April 2011, AUTEK Reference number 10/199.**

## Appendix 3 Consent Form for Observations



Project title: **The influence of Confucian values: University students' understandings of classroom behaviours and learning practices in contemporary China**

Project Supervisor: **Dr. Nesta Devine**

Researcher: **Jinhua Song**

Please tick whichever applicable:

I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated dd mmmm yyyy.

I agree to participate in classroom observation and understand that the notes or video-taped will be used during the observations.

If I withdraw from observation, I understand that while it may not be possible to destroy all the observation notes of which I was part, the relevant information about myself including notes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will not be used.

I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes    No

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's contact details (if appropriate):.....

Date: .....

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 April 2011, AUTEK Reference number 10/199.**

## Appendix 4 Translations of Participant Information Sheets

### 参与者信息文件



### 信息文件产生的日期:

2010年7月21日

### 方案标题:

儒家价值观的影响：当代中国大学生对课堂行为和学习实践的理解

### 邀请:

我叫宋金花，目前在新西兰奥克兰理工大学攻读教育学哲学博士研究生。我的研究项目的兴趣是关注影响大学生学习的一些因素。你被邀请参加该项目的采访，主要是反思一下你自己的学习实践及教室行为，看看在多大程度上它们受到儒家学习观的影响。

你的参与是完全自愿的。在收集资料之前，你可以在任何时候退出该项目。此外，你还可以针对该项目提出任何疑问。

### 该研究的目的是什么？

该研究是为了探索一下中国学生如何解释他们被观察到的课堂行为和学习实践的，这些学生的解释、描述和叙述等是怎样反映儒家的学习传统，而这些儒家的相关学习观又是如何影响学生的课堂行为和实践的。该研究尤其打算在学生的叙述中辨别出与儒家的学习观念相关的一些因素，尝试着描述一下这些重要的观念对学生日常课堂行为的可能性影响。

我是如何被挑选出来，又是如何被邀请参加该研究的？

在该研究中，我挑选参与者主要考虑其广泛的背景，比方说专业，学习经历以及学习成绩。总之，我将会和 20 个愿意参加该项目的学生进行交流，并通过一些朋友和同事与一些潜在的参与者进行最初的接触。

### **在该研究中什么将会发生？**

我会坐在教室的后面，观察你的实际学习行为。我会针对你的学习活动做些记录或者录像。

你的参与将包括从 2011 年 2 月到 11 月被采访 6 次。每次采访会持续 60 到 90 分钟，每次采访都会被录音。我将根据你的方便来安排采访的时间和长度。

### **有什么不舒服和危险吗？**

在该研究中不存在有意的不舒服和危险。但是尽管我进最大努力避免这种情况，我认识到讨论一些学习实践和学习行为仍然还会对一些被采访者造成职业上的潜在的不舒服。

### **这些不舒服和危险如何被减轻？**

我将会选择合适的词语和句子进行提问，以此来避免可能性的不舒服。你可以终止任何阶段的采访或者选择不回答一些问题。在该研究的所有阶段你的身份都会被保护。听采访录音的人将会是我和潜在的抄录该资料的人。你的身份将会一直保密。任何涉及该计划的人比方说资料抄录者都要签署一份保密意见书。你的身份不会被任何人知道。我的导师只看抄录好的资料，不听录音。

### **有什么好处？**

该方案是为了体察儒家的学习传统对学生日常学习生活的影响及其进一步发展。如果你参与该项研究，你有可能获得机会反思一下影响自己大学学习的基本信念、经验和定律。你同样有可能获得机会学到别的参与者的学习经验和学习信仰以及对他们的学习产生影响的一些重要因素。

### **我的隐私如何受到保护？**

你的匿名、隐私和保密将会受到保护。任何人的名字都不会出现在该研究中的报告中。假名可能会被使用。而且任何可能被辨别出来的信息都会被删除从而保证隐私性和保密性。采访会被录音。抄录录音带时，只用数字来表明被采访者。

我将会给你一份你每次被采访的录音抄录单。你有机会删除、澄清或者修改任何你不愿意被包括在该研究中的信息。

最初的资料和意向书会被储藏在奥克兰理工大学我的导师的带锁的柜子里。所有的原始资料将会在保存 6 年之后被摧毁。

### **参与该研究有什么花费？**

没有什么经济上的花费。但是我确实理解为了该研究每个参与者所做的贡献和付出的宝贵的时间。每个参与者会被采访最多 90 分钟。时间的变化会根据主题的不同而有所改变，但是不会超过预期的最多时间，除非你本人同意。有关该研究，没有别的预期的花费和不方便。

### **我有什么机会来考虑该邀请？**

尽管我希望你同意参加该研究，但是你的参与是自愿的。你可能会发现你的参与是有趣的、有回报的。请用一周左右的时间来考虑你是否愿意参与该研究。如果你感兴趣的话，请在某年某月某日之前给我发邮件 [songjinhuahh@hotmail](mailto:songjinhuahh@hotmail) 或者拨打我的电话 0086 xxxxxxxxxxxx.

### **我如何同意参与该研究？**

如果你同意参加该研究，请完成一份同意书。我会通过电子邮件发送给你。当第一次采访你的时候，我会让你在上面签名并交给我。

### **我会收到该研究的结果吗？**

你会被通知到哪里去得到该研究的最后报告。只要你要求，每个参与者都会得到一份电子版的研究报告。你同样会被告知任何有关该研究的将来公开出版物。

### **如果我有任何忧虑，我该怎么办？**

任何担忧可以首先和郑州大学国际教育学院院长于国强教授及我的导师 NESTA Devine 联系。 [yuguoqiang@zzu.edu.cn](mailto:yuguoqiang@zzu.edu.cn), 0086-371-67780101。  
[nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz), 0064-9-921 9999 - 8044

有关该研究的进展工作的担忧可以联系奥克兰理工大学伦理道德委员会主管秘书 Madeline Banda, [madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz), 0064-9 -921 9999 ext 8044.

关于该研究的进一步信息我应该和谁联系？

宋金花

邮箱: [songjinhua@hotmai.com](mailto:songjinhua@hotmai.com)

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Dr. Nesta Devine

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电话: 0064-9-9219999 -7631

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 April  
2011, AUTEK Reference number 10/199.**

## Appendix 5 Translations of Consent Form for Interviews

### 访谈同意书



研究题目：儒家价值观的影响：当代中国大学生对课堂行为和学习实践的理解

研究项目负责人：**Dr. Nesta Devine**

研究者：**宋金花**

- 我阅读并理解于某年某月某日在信息文件中所提供该研究的信息。
- 我有机会问问题并能够就这些问题得到相应的答案。
- 我理解在观察时该研究者会做一些笔录或者录像；在采访时该研究者会做一些录音。
- 我明白我本人或者我提供的任何信息都可以在该研究的任何阶段退出或取消而不被以任何方式造成不便。
- 如果我退出，我明白所有相关信息包括录音带、抄录单或其部分将会被销毁。
- 我同意参加该研究。
- 我希望收到该研究的报告（请打钩）：是  否

参与者签名： .....

参与者名字： .....

参与者联系方式： .....

日期： .....

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 April 2011, AUTEK Reference number 10/199.**

## Appendix 6 Translations of Consent Form for Observations



### 课堂观察同意书

研究题目：儒家价值观的影响：当代中国大学生对课堂行为和学习实践的理解

研究项目负责人： **Dr. Nesta Devine**

研究者： **宋金花**

请在合适的项目前面打钩：

- 我已经读了并明白在某年某月某日《信息文件》所提供的信息。
- 我同意参加课堂观察并明白在观察期间该研究者将会做一些笔记或者录像，其内容会被抄录下来。
- 如果我退出观察，我明白尽管不能销毁我所参与的所有观察记录，但是有关我自己的一些信息，比方说笔记、录像、抄录单等将不会被使用。
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**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 April 2011, AUTEK Reference number 10/199.**

