

**Examining the perceptions of the supervisory
relationship between Chinese-speaking postgraduate
students and English-speaking supervisors at
New Zealand universities**

By

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Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this thesis submitted for the Master degree is the result of my own study, except for where due acknowledgment is made. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by neither another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Anna Edmonds

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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Abstract

This study explores the perceptions of Chinese-speaking postgraduate students and English-speaking supervisors involved in the supervisory relationship in New Zealand universities. As Chinese students form a significant part of the postgraduate cohort in New Zealand, their level of satisfaction with the supervisory process has become a concern for the New Zealand export education industry. On the other hand, the challenges supervisors face during intercultural supervision have not been well explored in New Zealand context. The aim of this study was to bridge the gap and provide an opportunity for both Chinese-speaking students and English-speaking supervisors to express issues that are pertinent to them in the supervisory process.

The results were based on a qualitative research study conducted at five New Zealand universities, 28 Chinese students and 23 supervisors participated in the survey, and 10 Chinese students and 10 supervisors volunteered to be interviewed. This study found that overall Chinese students and supervisors were satisfied with their supervisory relationships. However, findings indicated that both Chinese students and supervisors were often unaware of each other's expectations or assumptions during the supervisory process, and they found it difficult to communicate effectively when issues were raised. Both the students and supervisors acknowledged that there were linguistic and cultural difficulties which resulted in barriers to effective communication.

The study suggests that it is important for both Chinese students and supervisors to be aware of cultural differences and the importance of adequate knowledge of intercultural communication strategies, so both parties are able to meet each other's expectations and needs.

Chapter 1 Introduction

As China's economy continues to grow, more and more Chinese students have chosen to study at English speaking universities. New Zealand is one of the destinations where Chinese students choose to get their higher education. Chinese students not only contribute to New Zealand's economy, but they have also become the largest international education market in New Zealand. According to the Ministry of Education (2009), there were 93,505 international students; 20,579 were Chinese and they were the largest cohort amongst the international students in 2009. In 2012, the Ministry of Education again reported that the total number of international students was 48,100, and "the largest contingent of international learners in New Zealand education institutions came from China (24%)"; this was 11,544 Chinese students (p.36). Comparing the figures in 2009, the 2012 figure showed an almost 50% drop in the number of international students as well as Chinese students in the education export industry. The huge fall in numbers may be caused by a number of factors including: the rising New Zealand dollar, changes in New Zealand immigration policies, the quality of higher education, as well as negative stories in the media about international students' experiences in New Zealand (Campbell & Li, 2008; Zhang & Brunton, 2007). Hence, it is worthwhile to explore international students' experiences, in particular those from China, so that New Zealand educators will know the deficiencies and areas for improvement so that the New Zealand export education industry and postgraduate study market will stay strong.

1.1 Purposes of the study

Since Chinese students in New Zealand form a considerable part of the international student body, it is important to listen to their voices and identify the challenges they

have faced or are facing in New Zealand. Although, there appears to be a large amount of literature on international students' experiences at Western universities (Abraham, 2007; Campbell & Li, 2008; Charles & Stewart, 1991; Choi & Nieminen, 2012; Rienties, et al., 2012; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002), "how international students, particularly Asian students, perceive the quality of New Zealand's education remains unexplored" (Campbell & Li, 2008, p.376). In most cases, researchers are likely to group Chinese students and all other Asian students into one group in their study, but they ignore the fact that Chinese students' experiences at Western academies can be somewhat different from other international students (e.g. Japanese or Korean students); they do not share the same language or cultural background, their educational system is different, and the way they think is also different. As a result, the findings of studies of international students' experiences and perceptions can only partially represent Chinese students' experiences and perceptions.

In fact, there is little research about Chinese students, particularly Chinese research students' experiences and their perceptions towards Western supervision (Chung & Ingleby, 2011; Singh, 2009). Chinese research students and their supervisors are often drawn from widely differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds, which can be challenging for both cohorts. The current studies (Chang & Strauss, 2010; Chen & Bennett, 2012; Lai, et al., 2013; Skyrme, 2007; Zhang & Zhou, 2011; Zhou, 2011) in postgraduate supervision have given different views of the supervisory relationship. However, they do not sufficiently account for the understanding of intercultural supervision, in particular between Chinese students and their English-speaking supervisors in the supervisory relationship.

On the other hand, a great deal of research has focused on the supervisors' challenges, cross-cultural supervision challenges, and how postgraduate research students should be supervised in a Western context e.g. the American context, the Australia context, the UK context (Delamont, Atkinson, & Parry, 2004; Eley & Jennings, 2005; Green, 2005; Lee, 2008; Manathunga, 2005; Phillips & Pugh, 2010; Wisker, 2005), but there is little research about English speaking supervisors' experiences and perceptions towards their international research students in a New Zealand context. This thesis seeks to explore the perceptions and experiences of both the Chinese-speaking students and their English-speaking supervisors during the supervisory process in the New Zealand context.

I hope this study can contribute useful information for other Chinese students or supervisors involved in postgraduate supervision at New Zealand universities; this study may help them to avoid misunderstandings caused by linguistic and cultural differences. It might be also be useful for other relationships between Chinese-speakers and English-speakers in New Zealand, such as Chinese undergraduate students and their English-speaking lecturers, Chinese-speaking employees and their English-speaking work supervisors, or English-speaking employees and their Chinese-speaking work supervisors.

1.2 Research questions

Three research questions are explored:

1. What are the Chinese speaking students and English speaking supervisors' perceptions of the supervisory relationship at New Zealand universities?

2. What are the main challenges for Chinese speaking students and English speaking supervisors during intercultural supervision in the New Zealand context?
3. How do Chinese speaking students and English speaking supervisors seek to overcome the challenges which occur during their supervisory process?

1.3 Overview of the thesis

The thesis consists of six chapters, and is organized as follows. In Chapter 2, a review of relevant literature pertaining to supervision and intercultural communication is presented. In Chapter 3, a detailed explanation of the methodology is provided, followed by a presentation of the data collection instruments and participants, the researchers' role, and data analysis. In Chapter 4, the results of surveys and interviews are presented respectively. At the end of this chapter, the key findings from both the survey and interview results will be highlighted in a summary. In Chapter 5, important findings in both surveys and interviews are discussed. Finally, the conclusion, the limitations of the study, and some recommendations for future research are also presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter consists of two sections. First, a brief background of the literature on postgraduate supervision is explored. This is followed by a review of the perceptions of the supervisory relationship in a Western context, Chinese context, and intercultural context, and then a discussion of the challenges of the supervisory relationship according to previous studies. Second, a review of intercultural differences is presented to highlight the issues of the supervisory relationship between Chinese-speaking postgraduate students and English-speaking supervisors. These issues include cultural perspectives and intercultural differences. Lastly, the research gaps will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

2.1 Postgraduate Supervision

2.1.1 Background

Postgraduate supervision emerged when PhD programmes were first introduced at the University of Berlin in 1810 (Park, 2005). The concept of a PhD was based on freedom of teaching, freedom of learning and freedom of research to raise the intellectual level so that “teachers made good researchers and good research in turn made better teachers” (Simpson, 1983, p.13). These ideas attracted many ambitious students from Britain and America at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1861, Yale, as the first university in America, started using the idea of postgraduate education (Park, 2005; Simpson, 1983). By the end of the nineteenth century, postgraduate supervision was used throughout North American universities (Simpson, 1983). By 1917, most British universities had established PhD programmes, and then later other former British colonies started using postgraduate supervision; these countries include Canada,

Australia, and New Zealand (Emilsson & Johnsson, 2007; Lee, 2008; Manathunga, 2005; Morris, Pitt, & Manathunga, 2011; Newman, 2005; Park, 2005; Simpson, 1983).

Therefore, postgraduate supervision began more than a century ago, when it was more likely to refer to those research students who were doing PhD degrees. However, modern postgraduate supervision refers to all Masters and PhD research students, and is widely recognised as pedagogy by most institutions of higher education around the world.

2.1.2 Western postgraduate supervision

Modern postgraduate supervision in Western academic institutions has become a very important process in the successful completion of research studies (Afferro, Norhasni Zainal, & Aminuddin, 2011; Hemer, 2012; Ives & Rowley, 2005; Wisker, 2005).

However, the process can be challenging for both supervisors and students even those who share the same language and cultural background. It is because, on the one hand, the native English-speaking students (NESs) have their own thoughts about what they want to achieve from supervision, and they also have certain expectations about how they want to be helped by their supervisors. On the other hand, supervisors also have their own ideas about how they want to supervise the students and how much they want to be involved with NESs both academically and psychologically during the supervisory process. The different expectations create a complicated supervisory relationship between the NESs and supervisors (Hemer, 2012; Manathunga, 2009; Morris, Pitt, & Manathunga, 2011). The significant factors which cause the complexity will be reviewed in the next section.

2.1.2.1 English-speaking students' perspectives

In previous studies of postgraduate supervision in a Western context, researchers (Bartlett & Mercer, 2000; Knox et.al, 2006; Krase, 2007; Lessing & Schulze, 2003; Manathunga, 2007; Schlosser et.al, 2003) found that students expected their supervisors to perform diverse roles, such as friend, colleague, mentor, advisor, facilitator, guide, personal motivator, writing tutor, editor, emotional supporter, or parental figure. In a sense, students need a supervisor who is a polymath (a person whose expertise spans a significant number of different subject areas). Some of the roles may be considered as unrealistic by the supervisors; these will be discussed under supervisors' perspectives.

In many cases, students expect their supervisors to support them academically, which includes regular face to face meetings, consistent email correspondence, and providing advice and constructive criticism (Eley & Jennings, 2005; Green, 2005; Lessing & Schulze, 2003; Li & Seale, 2007; Wisker, 2005); some may expect their supervisor also to provide psychological support, such as listen to students' personal issues, socialize with their students, and motivate them when they did not perform well during the supervision, and so on (Eley & Jennings, 2005; Fazackerley, 2005; Green, 2005; Li & Seale, 2007). Lessing & Schulze (2003) discovered that students who had good relationships with their supervisors or satisfactory supervision had supervisors who were willing to put effort and time in assisting the students, and that included both academic and psychological support for the students. Fazackerley (2005) found that students who had positive views toward their supervisors were often like friends: they maintained some personal interaction and the supervisors were more likely to be supportive and spend time with their students.

The students' challenges were also discovered in previous studies. In an earlier study of students' experiences in the UK, Rudd and Simpson (1975) found that most students who had an unsupportive supervisor would discontinue their PhD studies. In the UK, Fazackerley (2005) also discovered many students struggled with unsupportive and unhelpful supervisors who did not put in effort and time for the students, and some just had to quit study, or change to another supervisor. Lubbe et al. (2005) revealed that a number of PhD students in the UK had taken legal action against the institutions because they could not complete their PhD degree or they had been failed by the examination board, as the students argued that they had not received enough time and support from their supervisors.

Compatibility is also a factor that creates problems in the supervisory relationship (Eley & Jennings, 2005). According to "The Thesis Whisperer"(n.d.) (a web blog for postgraduate research students), Laura, a PhD student, said that although she had a conscientious, organized and well-intentioned supervisor, she felt overwhelmed by her supervisor's feedback because her thinking and writing style was different from her supervisor's. Other students also felt that they and their supervisors just weren't compatible, but "that does not make them a bad supervisor, just not the right person for me" (para.5). It appears that compatibility is an important issue which can affect the relationship between the NESs and their supervisors. Some students on this blog felt they had not been well treated by their supervisors. While these insights must be treated with great caution as many of the contributors remained anonymous, the presence of these comments does indicate a certain degree of student dissatisfaction. It is hoped that the interviews in this study will produce more reliable data.

Even though NESs are not the focus of this study, it is useful to state these issues, because if Chinese students have the same issues as English-speaking students, it would be harder for Chinese students as they not only face the same challenges that English-speaking students do, but they also face language and intercultural challenges. This will be discussed in more detail in the section on Intercultural Supervision.

2.1.2.2. English-speaking supervisors' perspectives

English-speaking supervisors (supervisors) are one of the targeted groups in this study, and thus it is essential to understand the point of view of supervisors as this may reflect on how they perceive Chinese-speaking students in Western supervision, since little research has been done previously on this topic. Supervisors might view their NESs as student, apprentice, independent researcher, critical reviewer, or competent writer (Emilsson & Johnsson, 2007; Green, 2005; Lee, 2008; Lessing & Schulze, 2003; Manathunga, 2007; Petre & Rugg, 2010; Wisker, 2005). Many of them expect their student to be independent, to accomplish the role of a researcher, and to write a dissertation or thesis in the scheduled timeframe (Lessing & Schulze, 2003). The model of postgraduate supervision is unlike normal teaching and learning in higher education: it only involves one student and one or two supervisor/s (Grant, 2003). So supervisor/s normally consider themselves teacher, mentor, and advisor (Knox et.al, 2006; Manathunga, 2007; Moss, 2009; Pearson & Brew, 2002; Pearson, 2004; Price & Money, 2002; Schlosser et.al, 2003; Wisker et al., 2007). Some supervisors may even see themselves as being like the family doctor:

“They will provide some specific expertise, but will also be a gatekeeper to many more learning resources, specialist opinions and networks. The supervisor can choose which gates to open, particularly in the early stages of the researcher’s life.” (Lee, 2008, p.272)

In an addition to those roles, some supervisors might maintain a collegial and friendly relationship (Hemer, 2012), a parental relationship (Bartlett & Mercer, 2000), a confessor and penitent relationship (Chapman & Sork, 2001), a counselor type of relationship (Benaquisto, 2000), a boss and employee relationship, a master and apprentice relationship (Grant, 2003; Hemer, 2012), a master and slave relationship (Grant, 2008), or a marital relationship (Petre & Rugg, 2010), in order to accommodate their students' needs. However, not all supervisors would want to sacrifice their own desires just to meet their students' needs; they would expect their students to be independent both academically and emotionally.

Benaquisto (2000) shares her experiences and perceptions of being a supervisor. First, she was reluctant to be too close to her students, as she found that the closeness could create dependency for the students. Second, she believed that the obligation and responsibility should be "a two way street" in a supervisory relationship (p.74), as one of her students did not meet the students' obligations and responsibilities as the student kept lying to her about the work which she had not even begun, and the student kept missing scheduled meetings and presentations. Third, she thought that if students continuously could not meet their obligations and responsibilities, the supervisor should end the supervisory relationship, as she said, "Once I lost trust in the student's word...I could not rely on the student to meet the obligations or even trust that she was conducting her research in a honest and reliable manner" (p.74). As Benaquisto (2000) suggested, not only do the supervisors have obligations and responsibilities, but also the students.

Petre & Rugg (2010) also point out that in the supervisory relationship it is not just the supervisor's responsibility to make the supervisory relationship effective, but it also

needs both parties to work together. While students may want a close relationship with their supervisor/s, not every supervisor wants to have a close relationship with their students. The supervisors do not think that they should “put up with every unpleasant idiosyncrasy of every idiot who want to do a PhD with them” (Petre & Rugg, 2010, p.44). If students expect their supervisor to be upfront with them, they also need to be straightforward with their supervisor. The researchers also suggested that the supervisory relationship should be a two way street, either supervisors or students fail to meet their obligations and responsibilities, the supervisory relationship is more likely to be problematic.

Other than students who do not take their roles seriously, students’ unrealistic expectations can be issues for supervisors as well. For example, Lessing and Schulze (2003) and Petre & Rugg (2010) highlight that some students expect their supervisors to return feedback on their written work within a few days of their sending it. This is impossible for supervisors to do, because most supervisors need time to read it through, and then make some comments and suggestions. Petre & Rugg (2010) also criticise some students who expect their supervisors to be perfect. Eley & Jennings (2005) reveal that some students expect their supervisors to know their needs without telling the supervisor what they need in the supervisory relationship.

Additionally, the poor quality of students’ written work, deficient writing skills, a lack of ability to find materials, intellectual problems, managing criticism and self-management are also challenges which supervisors face during the supervisory relationship (Lee, 2008; Lessing & Schulze, 2003; Li & Seale, 2007; Petre & Rugg, 2010).

On the other hand, there are also positive aspects in supervision which are pointed out in the research. For example, Lessing & Schulze (2003) found that many supervisors also mentioned “I learn a lot ... the students expose me to new things... and different research methods” (p. 162).

2.1.2.3 Summary of Western postgraduate supervision

In the Western supervision context, both native English-speaking students and English-speaking supervisors, who share the same cultural and linguistic background, face challenges like the different expectations, needs, and ways of thinking and working in the supervisory relationship. Students, on the one hand, expect to be directed, facilitated, and advised in their thesis process; on the other hand, they expect to be given the freedom as to how they write it up, yet at the same time wish to receive emotional and academic support from their supervisors (Brown & Atkins, 1986; Kelly & Ling, 2001; Pearson & Brew, 2002). Supervisors, in general, expect their students to be independent, self-disciplined, and self-directed (Manathunga, 2007). However, many of these different expectations are “usually unspoken and unapparent rules within the academy” (Moss, 2009, p. 73), as both students and supervisors assume their counterparts know what their roles are and what they need to do. Thus, the gap between reality and assumption causes challenges in the supervisor relationship (McCormack & Pamphilon, 2004; Moss, 2009). In other words, the issues in the supervisory relationship often occur because there is a lack of communication during the supervision.

In the next section, postgraduate supervision will be reviewed in the Chinese context.

2.1.3 Chinese postgraduate supervision

Western postgraduate supervision has been reviewed in Section 2.1.2; it has been established in Western academies for more than a century. Chinese supervision is quite different from Western supervision. According to Zhou (2010), Chinese postgraduate supervision was started to imitate the Japanese higher education system, and then it followed the higher education system of the United States. However, after the communists took power, the Chinese higher education system turned to the Soviet Union and learnt their ways until the Cultural Revolution started in 1965. During the Cultural Revolution, schools and colleges were closed; no one was allowed to make any criticism about Mao's beliefs; anyone who was educated was in great danger of torture, or even being killed by the "Red Guards" (红卫兵). The postgraduate education system was restarted after the Cultural Revolution ended in 1978, and the United States model of higher education began to be used again (Yang, 2011; Zhou, 2010).

Since then, higher education in China has expanded very quickly in a very short period of time; numbers of students have increased from 1.1 million in 1998 to 5.5 million in 2006 (Zhao & Sheng, 2008). The result of quick expansion generated a huge demand for teachers to teach in high level institutions and supervise postgraduate students. Prior to the expansion in 1998, there was one teacher to every eight students; in contrast, in 2006 one teacher would have 16 or more students (Zhao & Sheng, 2008). In Zhou's (2010) research, each supervisor had 20 or more PhD students on average; one supervisor even had 47 PhD students and this did not include Masters students; and another supervisor had 110 postgraduate students. One of the reasons why some Chinese supervisors have so many postgraduate students is because many students in China tend to choose a supervisor who is authoritative, highly reputable and well-known in their study areas.

They are likely to believe that the famous teacher trains top students which is derived from an idiom which says this “名师出高徒” (Míngshī chū gāotú). They also tend to believe that famous teachers can help them to achieve high marks in their study; also the name of the teacher will be a very good reference for their resume. Another reason why the majority of Chinese supervisors have over 20 postgraduate students to supervise is that people in China believe that education is the stepping stone to success, especially after the Cultural Revolution. The demand for China’s higher education as well as the demand for lecturers and supervisors is relatively high. However, many institutions lack highly qualified lecturers and supervisors to supervise postgraduate students. Many supervisors who were undergraduates worked as lecturers in institutions for a period of time, and then they were appointed as professors or associate professors to supervise postgraduate students regardless of whether they were competent or not (Liu, Cheng, Zhang, & Li, 2012). In addition, political factors, economic factors, and educational system factors also cause postgraduate supervision to be quite complicated in China (Zhao & Sheng, 2008).

2.1.3.1 Chinese-speaking students’ perspectives

Chinese-speaking postgraduate students (hereafter Chinese students) is the other focus group in this study. It is crucial to understand how they are supervised by Chinese-speaking supervisors (hereafter Chinese supervisors) in China, since their experiences of being supervised by Chinese supervisors will be somewhat reflected in their experiences of being supervised by English-speaking supervisors.

Chinese students are expected to respect their teachers in China, as many old idioms show, for example, “尊师重道” (zūn shī zhòng dào) which means students should respect their teachers, and teachers’ instruction is very important; and “一日为师，终

身为父” (Yī rì wéi shī, zhōngshēn wèi fù) which means the student is expected to respect his/her teacher, even if the teacher only taught the student for one day, the student is still required to treat the teacher like his/her parent for their lifetime. Hence, the expectation and cultural value from the society determines the Chinese students’ mindset in which they are required to respect their teacher, listen to their teacher, and follow their teacher’s instruction. Otherwise, students will be judged as being impolite, uncultivated, or arrogant (Zhou, 2010).

In the Chinese supervisory relationship, unlike English-speaking students, Chinese students are unlikely to see their supervisors as their friend or colleague. Most likely, they see them as their teacher, parent, manager, boss, leader, or master (Liu, Cheng, Zhang, & Li, 2012; Zhou, 2010). Talking about expectations with supervisors or critiquing supervisor’s ideas is likely to be seen as challenging the supervisors’ power and their superior status. Students often are constrained in their thoughts, and discontented in their studies, as most of the projects they do are their supervisors’ research project. Students do not have the freedom to do what they want to do for their thesis and their work is often allocated by their supervisors. The most difficult part is that the students have done the major part of the research but their names are not shown in the articles or books when the research is later published (Zhou, 2010). In some cases, students do the whole research for their supervisors and their contributions towards the research are never named (Lei, 2010). Some postgraduate students in China are no longer students who study something they are passionate about; they have become free labourers who do the supervisors’ work, such as organizing the supervisors’ administrative paper work, and even doing their housework (Lei, 2010; Zhou, 2010). This phenomenon in China's higher education is quite common. A lot of students are

angry but they are also afraid to say anything as they risk retaliation by their supervisors (Zhou, 2010).

It is possible that these reasons are partly responsible for more and more Chinese students going overseas to do their postgraduate studies. They are eager to improve the standards of their research skills, to have their own research and then be able to publish their research. They want to expand their knowledge, enhance their self-learning ability, develop their ability to innovate, and have the opportunity to participate in academic seminars. More importantly, they are looking for a free, equal, and open way to pursue their professionalism.

2.1.3.2 Chinese-speaking supervisors' perspectives

Chinese speaking supervisors are not focussed on in this study, but understanding some attributes of Chinese students from the Chinese supervisors' perspective would give more understanding of the challenges they face in Western supervision. In this section, Chinese supervisors' perspectives will be briefly discussed.

According to Zhou (2010), the biggest challenge with Chinese supervisors is that they have too many PhD students to supervise at the same time, but none of them point out that they have too many students to supervise or they have too much of a workload. On the one hand, they think they do not need to meet their students regularly like Western supervisors, students should rely on their own abilities to complete their studies. On the other hand, supervisors suggest students need to take the initiative, contact them with regular reports about their progress, and talk to their supervisors about any difficulties in their studies (Liu, Cheng, Zhang, & Li, 2012). Some supervisors also commented that students were relatively passive, always went along with the supervisors' ideas, and if the supervisors did not ask the students to do the work, the students would not do

anything. Furthermore, many students did not have a sound foundation of research or writing skills (Zhou, 2010).

2.1.3.3 Summary Chinese postgraduate supervision

In Chinese supervision, Chinese students and Chinese supervisors have different perceptions about each other. The complexity of the supervisory relationship in China has many aspects, for example, dissatisfaction is often the beginning of the deterioration of the hierarchical relationship between students and supervisors (Liu, Cheng, Zhang, & Li, 2012). According to some sources, Chinese students tend to be treated as children, free labourers, followers, or even slaves, whereas Chinese supervisors are the final authority in Chinese supervision (Ladd & Ruby, 1999). This unequal status also causes difficulties in communication between supervisors and students. Students would not say anything if their supervisors did not give enough time, support or advice; on the other hand, the supervisors think that students should take the initiative in their studies, and they should rely on themselves not depend on their supervisors.

Overall, it appears that the present education system is the main factor that causes the imbalance of the student supervisor relationship in China. As Zhou (2010) observes, there is no organisation that monitors the supervisors' responsibility and ability in the supervision, and there is no postgraduate students committee like Western universities where students can give feedback or make complaints if they have an issue in their supervision. Therefore, there is unlikely to have a place where can act as a mediator to resolve the issues happened between the students and supervisors.

2.1.4 Intercultural postgraduate supervision

For many reasons an increasing number of Chinese students have enrolled in postgraduate studies in Western universities, such as New Zealand as in this study. The New Zealand educational system and the Chinese educational system do not share the same educational philosophy or the ideas in teaching and learning styles, hence “if the issues exist between students and supervisors who share the same cultural and linguistic background, the position is far more complex for parties who came from widely differing educational and social systems” (Strauss, 2012, p.2). Nevertheless, there little research has been done about Chinese postgraduate students’ perceptions of New Zealand supervision.

Asian students who choose to study at Western universities tend to face enormous challenges such as language difficulties, cultural differences, different education systems, different learning styles, isolation, loneliness, and homesickness (Campbell & Li, 2008; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Zhang & Brunton, 2007; Zhang & Zhou, 2011; Zhou, 2011). Some students may also face financial difficulties, visa problems, employment commitments, and family expectations (Chang, Arkin, Leong, Chan, & Leung, 2004; Charles & Stewart, 1991; Zhang & Brunton, 2007). These challenges can put Asian students in very vulnerable situations. In the case of postgraduate supervision, supervisors may be the only people that the Asian students can rely on. However, many supervisors in Western universities do not want to have a close relationship with their students regardless of whether the students are NESs or international students; all they intend to do is give advice and make suggestions about the students’ study, not their personal life. As mentioned before, English supervisors expect their students to conduct their research independently (Emilsson & Johnsson, 2007; Green, 2005; Lee, 2008;

Lessing & Schulze, 2003; Manathunga, 2007; Petre & Rugg, 2010; Wisker, 2005).

Accordingly, both Chinese students and their English-speaking supervisors face challenges in their supervision. In the next section, the issues of intercultural supervision will be reviewed from the Chinese postgraduate students' perceptions as well as the English-speaking supervisor's perceptions respectively.

2.1.4.1 Chinese-speaking students' perspectives

The quality of the supervisory relationship is of great concern in both the Western context and the Chinese context. It is most likely that Chinese students bring their Chinese learning styles and educational experiences into Western supervision which may not match Western academic expectations (Cadman, 2000). Most Chinese students are aware of the differences between them and their supervisors, so they adapt to the Western education environment quite quickly, but for some, they may take longer to get used to the Western academic culture (Cadman, 2000; Gu, 2011).

The major challenge which Chinese students may face is in the earlier stages of the supervision (Edwards & Ran, 2006; Gu, 2011). Chinese students often lack confidence in speaking English, and they only join the discussion when invited by their supervisors; also they may not understand supervisory conventions in Western universities (Gu, 2011). They might expect some pastoral care (e.g. help students find a place to live, advise students about places of interest) from their supervisor who might be the only person they know at a new university in a new country (Edwards & Ran, 2006). Newly arrived Chinese students are particularly vulnerable during the initial stages of supervision.

Once the students adapt to the new environment, self-confident students may be more independent than those who have less confidence. While there may be some on-going

issues and uncertainties about the expectations and needs in the supervisory relationship, Chinese students are often extremely reluctant to talk about them; this is also found in the Chinese context (Zhou, 2010). They would rather stay silent as they “fear... compromising their academic or departmental status” (Baallard & Clanchy, 1991, as cited in Cadman, 2000, p.484). At the same time, they also think that many issues they face in the supervisory relationship cannot be resolved (Cadman, 2000).

No matter how fast Chinese students adapt themselves to Western academic culture, the language is the main problem affecting the supervisory relationship (Campbell & Li, 2008; Chang & Strauss, 2010; Gu, 2011; Strauss & Walton, 2005; Yang, 2011). For example, Chinese students often feel that they cannot express their thoughts clearly, their supervisor does not understand what they want to say, they cannot write their thesis logically, and they cannot debate or have a discussion about the topic with their supervisors due to inadequate vocabulary. Even though all Chinese students have met the entrance requirements of postgraduate study, “such success does not necessarily translate into the relevant text, genre and social knowledge required in the tertiary setting” (Chang & Strauss, 2010, p.419). As well as language difficulties, there are also cultural and social issues which add to the tensions in the supervisory relationship (Chang & Strauss, 2010). So the challenges that Chinese students face in Western supervision are quite different from the challenges they face in the Chinese context.

2.1.4.2 English-speaking supervisors’ perspectives

Some researchers might suggest that the English-speaking supervisors’ perspective of international students is similar to how they perceive ESSs, such as they would see their Chinese students as student, apprentice, and independent researcher (Buttery et al., 2005; Emilsson & Johnsson, 2007). Apart from the Chinese students not sharing the language

and cultural background of the supervisors, there are many other differences between ESSs and Chinese students, such as different learning styles, different ways of constructing knowledge, different ways of writing the thesis, and so on (Belcher, 1994; Campbell & Li, 2008; Chang & Strauss, 2010; Chen & Bennett, 2012; Choi & Nieminen, 2012; Skyrme, 2007; Strauss & Walton, 2005). It is possible that those supervisors do not see the difference between ESSs and Chinese students because they “are rarely aware of the cultural differences and they usually have not received training in supervising Chinese students” (Ingleby & Chung, 2009, p. 43). Wisker, Robinson, & Shacham (2007) point out that it is very important to identify the cultural differences:

“Mismatches between students’ expectations and preconceptions and the learning and research culture into which they are entering arise for both international and home-based students and their supervisors. Each could cause difficulties for student–supervisor relationships and the development of the research project through to success.” (p.304)

It is crucial for supervisors to be aware of the cultural differences in order to make some adjustment in supervising Chinese students rather than supervising all students in the same way.

The language difficulties of Chinese students are also emphasised by a number of supervisors (Belcher, 1994; Chen & Bennett, 2012; Ingleby & Chung, 2009; Strauss, Walton & Madsen, 2003; Strauss & Walton, 2005; Strauss, 2012). For example, Strauss (2012) says:

“Both students had great difficulty with what are generally regarded as basic grammatical skills: use of articles, prepositions, tense and punctuation. Sentence structure was problematic. Many of the sentences were very long and complex, and particularly in Nasser’s case, appeared to be translated from his first language...in Patrick’s case ...there

appeared to be no structure to the writing, and, at times, it appeared that he had simply written down a series of random thoughts, often his headings bore no relationship to the text they headed.” (p.3)

Belcher (1994) also identifies some language issues in Chinese students’ writing, for example:

“While many of the references and allusions in Li’s drafts were clearly connected with his argument, others appeared gratuitous; their sheer density had the effect of overshadowing Li’s own contribution to such an extent that one could justifiably wonder what indeed his contribution was.” (pp.26 -27)

Both examples display language issues among Chinese students. To some extent, postgraduate students are expected to write in a particular context which is academic writing, but Strauss (2012) argues:

“In a global environment can we, or more importantly should we, unilaterally be imposing such standards? If ownership implies the right to determine what is acceptable and what is not who owns English? Is it the native speakers of the language or the non-native speakers who are far more numerous?” (p.7)

The issue of how the English language should be used in academic writing will be further discussed in a later section.

2.1.4.3 Summary of intercultural supervision

In intercultural supervision, Chinese students face different challenges compared to the challenges they would have faced in Chinese supervision, whereas the supervisors would also face challenges which may be somewhat different from supervising ESSs. The quality of the Western supervision can be determined by how both students and supervisors experience the supervisory process, and that includes their understanding of

different learning styles, different ways of constructing knowledge, and different ways of writing the thesis.

2.1.5 Summary of supervisory relationship

Overall, the complexity of the supervisory relationship is exacerbated by a lack of communication. Second, the different expectations in roles and a lack of support for the students' emotional needs during the supervisory process are also factors affecting the student and supervisor relationship. Third, intercultural differences are also a factor affecting the student supervisor relationship.

The literature suggests that supervisors are the key factor for completing postgraduate study (Hemer, 2012; Manathunga, 2007; Wisker, 2005), nonetheless this is a two way street. Successful supervision not only requires supervisors to have the obligation and responsibility in assisting their students, but it also requires students to accept their obligations and responsibilities in solving problems independently (Benaquisto, 2000; Petre, & Rugg, 2010). Accordingly, adequate and constructive communication between students and supervisors is the key for successful completion of postgraduate study.

2.2 Intercultural differences

In this section of postgraduate supervision, cultural differences, such as different cultural background, different ways of thinking, and different ways of communicating (Campbell & Li, 2007; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Zhang & Brunton, 2007; Zhang & Zhou, 2011; Zhou, 2011) will be discussed. Cultural perspectives and intercultural communication will also be respectively reviewed in order to understand the differences between Chinese students and New Zealand supervisors.

2.2.1 Cultural perspectives

Culture, for the purpose of intercultural studies, has been defined as “the shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities around them” (Lederach, 1995, p. 9). It is also defined as “learned and shared human patterns”, which refers to the day to day living pattern (Damen, 1987, p. 367). Hofstede (1984) defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another” (p. 51). Yet while culture is shared by a group of people, it is learnt and understood through the process of socialisation.

Banks & Banks (2009) have summarised culture as follows:

“Most social scientists today view culture as consisting primarily of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies. The essence of a culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies. People within a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or in similar ways.” (p.8)

2.2.1.1 Cultural values

Chinese culture is a part of collectivistic cultures in which people value themselves as members of groups and usually consider the needs of the group to be more important than the needs of individuals (Banks & Banks, 2009; Hofstede, 1984; Oetzel, et al., 2001). Each individual is expected to follow the norms of the society, although personal achievement is highly valued, the success of the social group is far more important than

the individuals' success (Pan & Vanhoner, 1993). On the other hand, New Zealand culture, according to Hofstede (1984), is likely to be one of the individualistic cultures as people see themselves as individuals and emphasize the needs of individuals. People in individualistic cultures tend to see their personal achievement as more important than success in a social group, and individuals are expected and encouraged to seek risks as well as to think innovatively (Pan and Vanhoner, 1993). Generally, Children from Western families are considered to be adults when they become eighteen, leave home and fend for themselves, whereas East Asian children are regarded as children until they get married and move away from their parents. When East Asian children leave home to study, they tend to transfer their dependence onto their university lecturers, who become like de facto parents, and are relied on to solve their problems (Chuah, 2010).

Moreover, China is a high power distance culture, so the majority of people in China are likely to accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. Superiors who often are of high status have the power to be autocratic and paternalistic, whereas subordinates acknowledge the power of others simply based on where they are situated in certain formal, hierarchical positions (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). New Zealand, on the other hand, is a low power distance culture; people in New Zealand tend to relate to one another more as equals regardless of formal positions. Cultures that endorse low power distance expect and accept power relations that are more consultative or democratic.

Subordinates are more comfortable with and demand the right to contribute to and critique the decision making of those in power (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Therefore, it is likely that different cultural values would become an issue that impacts on the supervisory relationship between Chinese students and English-speaking supervisors in the New Zealand context.

2.2.1.2 Culture Stereotypes

Chinese students have been stereotypically viewed as quiet, passive and lacking in critical thinking (Cadman, 2000; Campbell and Li 2008; Chuah, 2010; Huang, 2005).

Chuah (2010) explains:

“Their learning strategies are very different from Western students, who are encouraged from young to be analytical and critical. East Asian students learn by listening; they want to fully absorb and understand what is being taught. They don’t feel that they have the ‘right’ to question what is being taught until they have completely understood all aspects of it. Moreover, they avoid being critical out of respect for the teacher, so that the teacher will not lose ‘face’ in front of other students, and to preserve harmony in the classroom, so that everything runs smoothly. There is also an element of preserving their own ‘face’, in case they are mocked for asking a ‘stupid’ question.” (p.1)

In a study in respect of Chinese students’ experiences of online learning in Western countries, which mainly focused on students’ views of the written form of communication, Chen and Bennett (2012) found that “students reported greater confidence in stating their opinions online than in a face-to-face environment because the medium removes some language barriers by allowing them to edit what they wanted to articulate” (p.678). The reasons for Chinese students being quiet, passive or lacking in critical thinking could partly be due to their lack of confidence in conversing in English (Campbell and Li, 2008; Chuah, 2010), or a lack of knowledge in their study areas (Cadman, 2000). One of the students in Cadman’s (2000) research revealed what she really thought about being critical:

“Learning how to criticise is very interesting for me ... This kind of activity can also be applied in our daily life. The life which is not easy needs our voice to say no if no, and yes if yes. Having the ability to give

argument about something is considered as a way of showing our existence. To let people know that we are here or there, and that we are what we are, should be implemented in our life. Of course, we often have the feeling of reluctance as our culture (Oriental culture) does not allow us to do so. But we have to keep trying to do that until we are confident enough. If not, we are dying with the buried thought in our mind and the hidden feeling in our heart.” (Cadman, 2000, p.481)

Therefore, this study will also examine how Chinese students are perceived in this regard.

2.2.1.3 Face

Face is one of the other factors that impact on intercultural supervision because face involves “how people think others see them in social situations and is an inherent communication of respect” (Kopelman and Rosette, 2008, p.67). According to Ho (1976), the concept of face is originally from Chinese, and the literal meaning is Lian (脸) and Mianzi (面子). Lian is the confidence of society in a person's moral character, while Mianzi represents social perceptions of a person's prestige (Ho, 1976; Yu, 2003). Highfield (2009) argues that the idea of face dates back to the ancient Greeks, and became a talking point in intellectual circles through the Swiss poet Johann Lavater in the late 18th century. Goffman in 1955, defined face as “positive social value a person claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (as cited in Longcope, 1995, p.69). So the concept of face is not just limited to China, but it is universal.

In previous studies, “Lian” and “Mianzi” represent the “communal and interpersonal” (Yu, 2003, p. 1685). Ho (1976) believes that face in Chinese culture is the “reciprocated compliance, respect, and deference that each party expects from, and extends to, the

other party” (p. 883). However, the concept of face “is not sophisticated enough to explain the complexity of the feelings of all those involved in such a situation” (Ingleby & Chung, 2009, p. 44). Face in Chinese language is used in many terms, for example, “Losing face” can also be called “Diulian” (丢脸) and “Diumianzi” (丢面子), “Having face”(有面子), “Saving face”, and “Lending face”. Ingleby & Chung (2009) explained the difference between the “Diulian” (丢脸) and “Diumianzi” (丢面子):

“Diulian” (丢脸)' is used for a situation where someone causes embarrassment by their own behaviour. For example, a child who did not meet their parents' expectations or an adult who behaved in an inappropriate manner would cause embarrassment to themselves because of their own actions. “Diumianzi” (丢面子)' is used to describe a situation where a person is embarrassed by the behaviour of another; perhaps because the other's wrongdoing is exposed or because the other is unable to comply with an obligation in a complementary relationship to fulfill an obligation or to comply with the other's expectations.” (p.44)

Face, as part of Chinese identity, is highly regarded, and it is likely that Chinese students bring their cultural identity into their supervisory relationship.

The concept of face can be perceived differently in individualistic cultures, such as New Zealand. Face would be that people are “more concerned with maintaining their own face compared to those in collectivistic cultures where there might be more concern with mutual or other face” (Ting-Toomey, as cited in Hwang, Francesco, & Kessler, 2003, p. 75). In other words, New Zealanders are more concerned with their own face than other people's face; they are likely to be direct and confrontational if they have conflicts with others. As a result, the different face concerns in Chinese culture and Western culture would become salient in intercultural communication, particularly when supervisors are unaware of the face issues of their Chinese students.

2.2.2 Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication generally involves interaction between people from different cultural background. Jackson (2014, p.44) describes it as “interpersonal communication between individuals or groups who are affiliated with different cultural groups and/or have been socialised in different cultural environment”. In this study, while both Chinese students and supervisors attempted to achieve a successful supervisory relationship, they needed to manage the criticism and disagreement in their interactional activities (Li & Seale, 2007). When those interactional activities happen to two people who are from two very different cultural backgrounds, they are most likely to rely on the norms of their native culture to interpret meaning (Kaur, 2011). Lacking knowledge of each other’s cultural perspectives has the potential to cause conflicts and communication breakdown (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). In this section, I will give some examples of how face threatening acts, and the enactment of politeness may affect intercultural supervision.

2.2.2.1 Face threatening acts

In intercultural communication, when encountering a conflict or sensing a potential conflict, interlocutors will defend their faces if they feel threatened (Peng & Tjosvold, 2011). Any acts that intrude upon or fail to satisfy face needs are called face-threatening acts (FTAs) (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Face threatening acts (FTAs) can be perceived in many ways, “any move which predicates a face inconsistent with the one presented up to that point in the on-going situation” is likely to be seen as FTA (O’Driscoll, 2007, p.256). For example, a Chinese student would respect the supervisor by not disagreeing with anything so as to give the

supervisor face. Even if the student has a different opinion they will not disagree with the supervisor. Equally, if the supervisor gives the student a straightforward statement that their work needs revision, the student would feel that they have lost face. The student will expect the supervisor to preserve the student's face by demonstrating the poor quality of work in a different way, perhaps by demonstrating a way of writing differently. Correspondingly, when the student advances in knowledge and experience, they would never expect to outshine their supervisor publicly because this would make the supervisor lose face. In many cases, directives are likely to make people feel threatened. If either students or supervisors feel threatened in the supervisory relationship, they need to communicate with each other as “the issues will not go away if they are ignored” (Ingleby & Chung, 2009, p. 44). It is possible that face threatening are one of the issues affecting the intercultural supervisory relationship.

2.2.2.2 Politeness

In any society, people's behaviour is “restricted by politeness and maintained by face” (Zhu & Bao, 2010, p.849). Politeness principles may vary from culture to culture. In Chinese society, people's behaviour is restricted by social expectation, and the Chinese emphasise maintaining class distinction and others' faces. Some people can command, warn or threaten others, while other people can only accept or complete the behaviour (Zhu & Bao, 2010). For example, the elderly can threaten younger ones, employers can warn their employees, teachers can command their students, and parents can force their children. In Western society, people pay much attention to individual power and individual privacy. Even in communication between employer and employee, parents and children, teachers and students, people are likely to use indirect requests (e.g. “Would you mind closing the door?” or “Could you possibly close the door?”) to ask

someone to do something (Gu, 2000, as cited in Zhu & Bao, 2010). While the respectfulness principle is a strong characteristic in Chinese culture, politeness strategies are more important in Western culture (Li & Seale, 2007). Li & Seale (2007) made some suggestions as to how politeness strategies are used in the supervisory relationship:

1. In general social interaction displaying supportive good manners (e.g. praise and gratitude);
2. Demonstrating mutual respect and sensitivity by listening for sources of embarrassment or misunderstanding (hesitations, silences or pauses), or displaying acknowledgement markers ('uhm', 'yes', 'right', 'ok', 'sure'), or using inclusive markers such as '*you* know', '*you* are trying to ...', '*you*'ve got';
3. Avoiding or ignoring situations or events which could cause embarrassment or loss of face (e.g. the abandonment of a controversial topic with '*shall we* leave it?');
4. Maintaining a balance of power by, for example, the supervisor unpicking questions when the student does not take up a turn at talk;
5. Preceding constructive criticism with praise and encouragement and expressions of caution (e.g. 'it seems'); and
6. Replacing criticism with advice delivery (e.g. 'perhaps you could ...' etc.). (p.521)

Misunderstandings can happen in many situations where the listener achieves an interpretation which makes sense to her or him, but it wasn't the one the speaker meant (Kaur, 2011). For example, a Chinese greeting such as “上哪儿去啊?” or “到哪儿去啦?” can be equivalent to the English greeting “Hi” or “How are you?”. However, if translated literally into English it would be “Where are you going?” or “Where have you been?” The natural reaction of most English-speaking people to this greeting would most likely be “It's none of your business!” So understanding one's politeness strategies is essential in intercultural communication. Chen, Chen, & Chang (2011)

found that in Western culture, people are likely to use ‘wh’ questions to make complaints, whereas Chinese people are likely to use ‘yes/no’ questions to make complaints. They suggest that ‘wh’ questions raise a positive attitude and ‘yes/no’ questions raise a negative attitude. In relation to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory, ‘yes/no’ questions show a negative face which is less polite than ‘wh’ questions. Another interesting result is the ‘request for repair’. Chen et al.’s (2011) findings show that American participants were more likely to use “would like”, whereas the Chinese participants were more likely to use “wo xiwang” (“I hope . . .”) or “wo xiangyao” (“I want to . . .”) to make requests. Again, the authors affirm that the perceptions of a speaker’s want statement from the American English point of view is “impolite or even rude”; while from Chinese’s point of view, it’s “soft, tentative, and polite” (Chen et al., 2011, p. 264).

Politeness can be perceived differently from culture to culture, and that could one of the issues in intercultural supervision.

2.2.3 Summary

In short, face is central in intercultural communication since many problems raised in social interaction are related to loss of face. Whether the people are from collectivistic cultures (like the Chinese culture) or individualistic cultures (like the NZ culture), no one should make their social counterparts lose face. Doing so may cause conflict.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter started with a brief introduction about the background of Western postgraduate supervision, and was followed by a review of the perceptions of the supervisory relationship in a Western context. Giving the perspectives of both native

English-speaking students and English-speaking supervisors helps us to understand Western supervision. Then the discussion shifted to the Chinese context. In a similar way, it helps us to understand the differences between Chinese supervision and Western supervision.

Lastly, intercultural supervision and both Chinese students and English-speaking supervisors' challenges were discussed.

In the second part of this chapter, a review of intercultural differences was presented to highlight the issues of the supervisory relationship between Chinese-speaking postgraduate students and English-speaking supervisors.

2.4 Research gaps

Based on the preceding literature review, there seem to be two significant gaps which this current study seeks to help bridge:

1. There is little research that focuses on both Chinese-speaking postgraduate students and English-speaking supervisors' perceptions of the supervisory relationship in a New Zealand context. Most of the studies in supervision focus on international students who may not share the same language and cultural background as Chinese students.
2. The relationship between Chinese students and supervisors has many facets and problems (Lee, 2008). There were some uncertainties about the findings in the previous studies, such as the dependency of Chinese students in the supervisory relationship, dealing with disagreements and criticism, and the

awareness of the concept of Chinese face, and their relevance to the current New Zealand context.

The following chapter will discuss the methodology used in this study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, reference was made to a number of studies which discussed the supervisory relationship between the two cohorts, Chinese students and English-speaking supervisors, in terms of the issues, the perceptions and intercultural communication strategies they experienced during the supervisory process. Most researchers have focused mainly on the perceptions of different native English-speaking postgraduate students or EAL (English as an additional language) postgraduate students, but not particularly on Chinese-speaking postgraduate students. In this study, I have investigated the issues and perceptions of both Chinese students and English-speaking supervisors of Chinese students in the New Zealand context.

In this chapter, a detailed explanation of the research methodology is provided which contains the research paradigm of this study, the criteria for the selection of participants, the data collection instruments, the researcher's role and the data analysis.

3.2 Research methodology

This is a qualitative research project adopting an interpretivist approach. In this approach reality is viewed as multiple constructions or interpretations rather than a single truth (Creswell, 2013; Green 2002; Merriam, 2009). The researcher seeks to engage with participants in order to understand the social and cultural contexts within which they live (Creswell, 2013; Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 2009; Myers, 2009). This approach allows “the complexities and difference of the worlds under study to be explored and represented” (Philip, 1998, p.267). Creswell (2009) points out that according to the interpretivist paradigm humans make sense of their worlds “based on

their historical and social perspectives” (p.8). It is therefore an approach well suited to exploring the perceptions of the participants in this study.

3.2.1 Data collection instruments

This study employed two data collection instruments, the survey and interview. Using these two instruments enabled me to gather the participants’ perceptions and experiences, and then tell the story from the participants’ perspective (Berg, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Green, 2002; Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 2009; Myers, 2009). The first phase of the data collection made use of a survey to obtain an overview of the target participants’ perceptions of the most important issues in the supervisory relationship. The second phase of the data collection was the conducting of semi-structured interviews with volunteers from the student and supervisor cohorts. The interviews allowed the researcher to further explore, in greater depth, the issues canvassed in the survey questionnaires.

3.2.1.1 The surveys

The purpose of a survey in qualitative research is to “observe social interactions or communications between persons in given populations, but only characteristics of the individual members involved” (Jansen, 2010, p.2). In a sense, it captures certain characteristics, attitudes or beliefs in people. In this study, the surveys were conducted online using snowball sampling for both Chinese students and supervisors.

“Snowball... sampling is perhaps the most common forms of purposeful sampling. This strategy involves locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria you have established for participation in the study. As you interview these early key participants you ask each one to refer you to other participants.” (Merriam, 2009, p.79)

So these participants were asked to refer me to other potential participants.

Online surveys have become a popular alternative research instrument over the last decade because of their inexpensive nature, widespread coverage and prompt results. Participants are more likely to respond through online surveys as not only can they finish online surveys in their own time, but they can also remain anonymous, especially when the questions are about sensitive issues (Holmes, 2006; Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Sarantakos, 1993). Apart from these advantages, the use of online questionnaires can “help to avoid bias or errors caused by the presence or attitudes of the interviewer” (Sarantakos, 1993, p.159). More importantly, if the researcher has no contact, the online survey is an easier way to get respondents than other methods, and the respondents from surveys had the potential to become the interviewees for the interviews. The disadvantages of online surveys are:

“They do not allow probing of questions, the identity of the respondent and the conditions under which the questionnaire was answered are not known. Researchers are not sure whether the right person has answered the questions. Due to lack of supervision, partial response is quite possible.” (Sarantakos, 1993, p.159)

The purpose of using online surveys for this study was to obtain an overview of the target participants’ perceptions of the most important issues in the supervisory relationship. Once the ethics application had been approved by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 23 August 2012, I approached the Ethics Committees, Postgraduate Schools, and Chinese/Asian Students Associations of all eight New Zealand universities. An explanation of the research project was emailed to these universities, along with four attachments - a copy of the Information Sheet (see Appendix A), a copy of the Consent Form (see Appendix B), a letter with a link to

SurveyMonkey for Chinese-speaking postgraduate students (see Appendix C), and a letter with a link to SurveyMonkey for English-speaking supervisors (see Appendix D). Potential participants were alerted to the study as information about the research was posted on the departments' electronic notice boards.

All participants in this study were advised that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The confidentiality of the participants was also ensured by not disclosing their names or personal information in the research. There were two different questionnaires – one for English-speaking supervisors and another for Chinese-speaking postgraduate students, with the latter written in Mandarin and English. A total of 24 questions were sent to Chinese-speaking postgraduate students (see Appendix E), and a set of 21 almost matched questions were sent to English-speaking supervisors (see Appendix F) at different New Zealand universities. Regrettably, there should be 24 questions in the supervisors' questionnaire to match with the Chinese students' questionnaire, but three questions had been missed out of the supervisors' one. This is one of the limitations of this study, and will be explained in the Discussion Chapter. All the questions were formulated after study of the literature and after informal discussions with my two supervisors and my fellow Chinese-speaking postgraduate students.

The aim of the surveys was to have as many responses from Chinese-speaking postgraduate students and English-speaking supervisors as possible in the two months of the online data collection period. It was hoped that the data from these questionnaires would inform the semi-structured interviews which would be conducted with volunteers from both cohorts. Participants were also asked if they would volunteer to be interviewed.

3.2.1.2 The interviews

The interviews were the second phase of the data collection in this study. As a method of qualitative research, the interview is repeatedly defined as a conversation with a purpose (Berg, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Jansen, 2010; Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). This means that the researcher is interested in a particular topic and wants to find out the perspectives related to the topic from participants. There are three types of interviews: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews (Merriam, 2009). This study opted to employ semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview emphasises certain aspects of the topic which can be quite sensitive for participants who come from divergent backgrounds, so it often uses the same open-ended questions to all interviewees in order to go with the flow of their story to collect the data (Welman and Kruger, 2001).

Every data collection instrument has its advantages and disadvantages. The advantage of the interview is that it allows researchers to gather valuable and large amounts of data about participants' beliefs, experiences and perceptions, especially if a number of participants are interviewed (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). The interview can help qualitative researchers understand people's experiences in particular social events. However, the issue with interviewing is that it is more likely to be controlled by the researchers. Creswell (2013) points out, "the interview is conducted one way, provides information for the research, is based on the researcher's agenda, leads to the researcher's interpretations" (p.173). Thus, when the interviewer and interviewee do not cooperate well, the interviewee may be reluctant to share their experiences and views with the interviewer (Creswell, 2013; Marshall and Rossman, 1999). Sometimes interviewees may have their reasons for not telling the truth (Marshall and Rossman,

1999), or interviewers may have empathy toward the interviewees so that the findings may become subjective and biased (Merriam, 2009).

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews in this study was to explore the issues which were revealed in the surveys more extensively, so the insights and concerns from both Chinese students and supervisors could be addressed and examined by the researcher. A total of ten Chinese-speaking postgraduate students and ten English-speaking supervisors were recruited from the first phase of online surveys. There was no dependent relationship between the researcher and the participants. Students' interviews were conducted in Chinese Mandarin, because using Chinese would be more natural for both interviewer and interviewees as we speak Chinese as our first language, and also using our first language would make the interview much easier for students to express their thoughts. Since we are all Chinese-speaking students at New Zealand universities, there was no power differential between me and the Chinese student participants.

The supervisors' interviews were conducted in English. As mentioned previously, I have spent many years studying at a New Zealand University, so there are likely to be few cultural or linguistic difficulties for me in understanding English. However, the supervisors I engaged with were in a more powerful position than me. This will be discussed further in the discussion section. The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. Participants were all asked whether they wanted the transcriptions to be sent to them; however, not all of them wanted this. Thus, interview transcripts were only provided to those who requested them. They were also asked to amend and add to any transcriptions if the need for correction arose. When the research is completed, a summary of the findings of this study will be sent to all participants.

3.2.2 Participants

As indicated in the introduction, this project seeks to explore the perceptions and insights of a number of Chinese-speaking students enrolled in postgraduate studies who have English-speaking supervisors at New Zealand universities, and a group of English-speaking supervisors with experience in supervising Chinese students. No attempt was made to match the groups.

3.2.2.1 Chinese-speaking postgraduate students

The criteria for the selection of Chinese-speaking postgraduate student participants were that they:

- 1) speak Chinese as their first language;
- 2) are either full-time or part-time postgraduate students at a New Zealand university;
- 3) have an English as a first language (L1) supervisor

The online surveys were completed by 28 Chinese-speaking postgraduate students of whom 10 volunteered for the interviews. Those students who took part in the interviews were from five different universities in the North and South Islands of New Zealand, and they represented a number of academic disciplines.

3.2.2.2 English-speaking supervisors

The criteria for the selection of English-speaking supervisor participants were that they:

- 1) speak English as their first language (L1);
- 2) are currently employed at a New Zealand university

3) are either in a supervisory role with a Chinese student or have been in a supervisory role with a Chinese student within three years prior to the commencement of this study.

The online surveys were completed by 25 English-speaking supervisors of whom 10 volunteered for the interviews. Those supervisors who took part in the interviews were from three different universities in the North Island of New Zealand, and they also represented a number of academic disciplines.

3.2.3 Researcher's role

It is crucial for the researcher to reflect on their own positioning and their role in the project, and any possible influence that could colour the findings such as biases, dispositions, and assumptions should be clearly stated. "Such a clarification allows the reader to better understand how the individual researcher might have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data" (Merriam, 2009, p.219). Furthermore, researchers are the key instrument of the research, although they may rely on instruments developed by other researchers; they are the ones who design the questions and make sense of the data (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).

I am likely to be more empathetic towards students who come from the same cultural background and whose situation I share, rather than empathetic towards the supervisors. Although I am fluent in English and familiar with New Zealand culture, I have a greater insight and understanding of both the Chinese language and Chinese culture. I was however aware of these biases and did my best not to allow them to colour my interpretation of the data.

3.2.4 Data analysis

In analysing qualitative data, researchers often rely on “insight, intuition and impression” (Creswell, 2013, p.182). Therefore, “identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together is the most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.154). Moreover, it often involves a lot of perceiving, comparing, contrasting, aggregating, ordering, and establishing linkages and relationships in the process of analysis.

There were two sets of data in this study: the data from surveys and the data from interviews. Both sets of data were analysed as Creswell (2013) suggested. That is, before I analysed the data, I prepared and organised it, transcribing the interviews into text form, and then coding and condensing the codes, and finally “representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion” (p.180).

In the analysis of the survey data, the first step was to code the data and combine the codes into a group of matched segments which were transferred into tables or figures. For example, there were 5 questions in each element of demographic information for both Chinese students and supervisors; the responses to each of these 5 questions were transferred into two tables, one for Chinese students and one for supervisors. The second step was to make comparisons in order for me to identify patterns and trends in the data. More often, this step involved descriptions, explanations and discussions which were usually brief. The third step was to categorise the codes into broader themes, and make sure the categories related to each other and related to the literature. The last step was to highlight the significant themes and link these themes to the interview data.

In the analysis of the interview data, the transcribed interviews were first read in order to identify emerging themes. As Creswell (2013) suggested, the next step was to interpret the data into detailed descriptions and then link the interpretation back to the literature. Accordingly, after capturing the patterns and themes in the transcribed text, each individual's views were represented in narrative format. At the same time, these descriptions and interpretations were thematically arranged in order to relate them to the primary research questions. The next step was to categorise the codes into broader themes, highlight the significant themes and then link them back to the literature as well as the surveys. After all of this was done, all themes were discussed in the summary of the findings.

In the next chapter, the findings of the surveys and interviews are reported.

Chapter 4 Results

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings from the surveys will be reported first. Following this, the findings from the interviews will be reported. At the end of this chapter, the key findings from both the survey and interview results will be highlighted in a summary.

4.2 Survey findings

4.2.1 Survey participants' demographics

All student and supervisor participants' demographics are shown separately in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Table 1: Chinese student participants' demographics

		Numbers	Percentage
<i>Age range</i>			
	20-29	16	57.0%
	30-39	8	28.6%
	40-49	2	7.1%
	50+	2	7.1%
<i>Gender</i>			
	Males	10	35.7%
	Females	18	64.3%
<i>Years in NZ</i>			
	Less than 1 year	5	18.5%
	1-2 years	10	37.0%
	3-5 years	3	11.1%
	6-10 years	7	25.9%
	11+ years	2	7.4%

Table 1 shows that the total of 28 student participants ranged in age from 20 to 50 plus.

There were 16 Chinese students in the age range of 20-29 years old, 57% of the total number of Chinese students. The age range in the next group was 30-39 years; it had 8 students which made up 28.6% of the total number of Chinese students. All Chinese students had lived in New Zealand for various periods of time, which meant that their

level of language proficiency and understanding of cultural differences differed; this may affect their perceptions of the supervisory relationship in New Zealand.

Table 2: Supervisor participants' demographics

		Numbers	Percentage
<i>Age range</i>			
	30-39	3	13.0%
	40-49	4	17.4%
	50-59	7	30.4%
	60+	9	39.1%
<i>Gender</i>			
	Male	13	59.1%
	Female	9	40.9%
<i>The number of Asian students they have supervised</i>			
	1-2	4	18.2%
	3-4	7	31.8%
	5 or more	11	50.0%

Table 2 shows that there was a total of 23 supervisor participants, ranging in age from 30 to 60 plus. There were 9 supervisors in the age range of 60 years old plus, 39.1% of the total number of supervisors. The age range in the next group was 50-59 years, it had 7 supervisors and was 30.4% of the total number of supervisors. Because of the supervisors' ages, all of them were very experienced. In addition, all supervisors had supervised Asian students for varying numbers of years. However, their level of experience and understanding of cultural differences, which may affect their perceptions of the supervisory relationship in New Zealand, also differed.

4.2.2 Participants' responses to statements

As mentioned in the methodology, there were two sets of questionnaires - one for Chinese students (see Appendix E) and one for supervisors (see Appendix F). The two sets of questionnaires were matched as far as was possible so that some general perceptions of the supervisory relationship from both cohorts could be identified. All findings were generated from their responses to the statements provided and their

comments have been divided into three sections. The first section covers both students and supervisors' perceptions about their relationship, the second section discusses the intercultural differences, and the last section outlines the advantages and challenges of the supervisory relationship. A graph for each question shows first the Chinese students' responses, followed by a graph showing the supervisors' responses.

4.2.2.1 Supervisory relationship

- Students and supervisors were asked whether the relationship they had with each other was friendly. Results are shown in Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.1

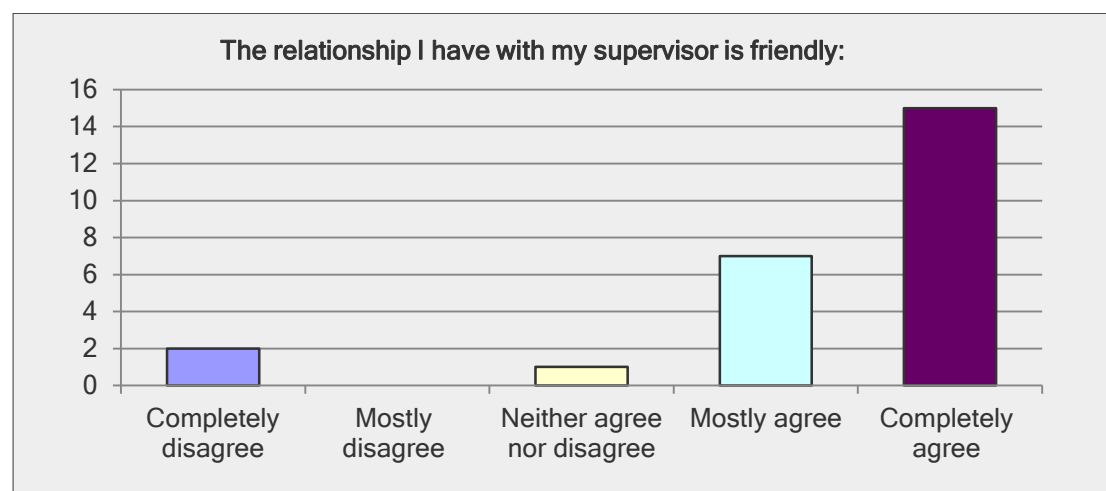
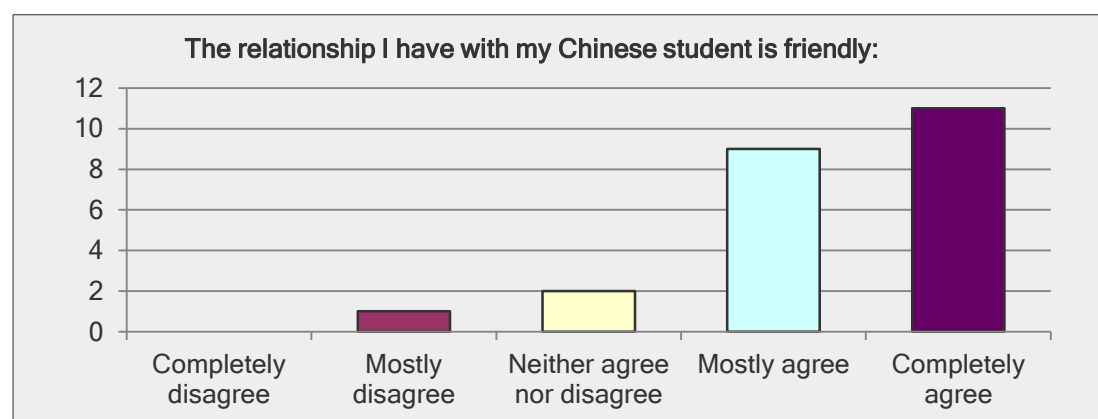


Figure 1.2



A total of 22 Chinese students and 20 supervisors mostly agreed or completely agreed with this statement, indicating that 88% students and 86.9% of supervisors had friendly

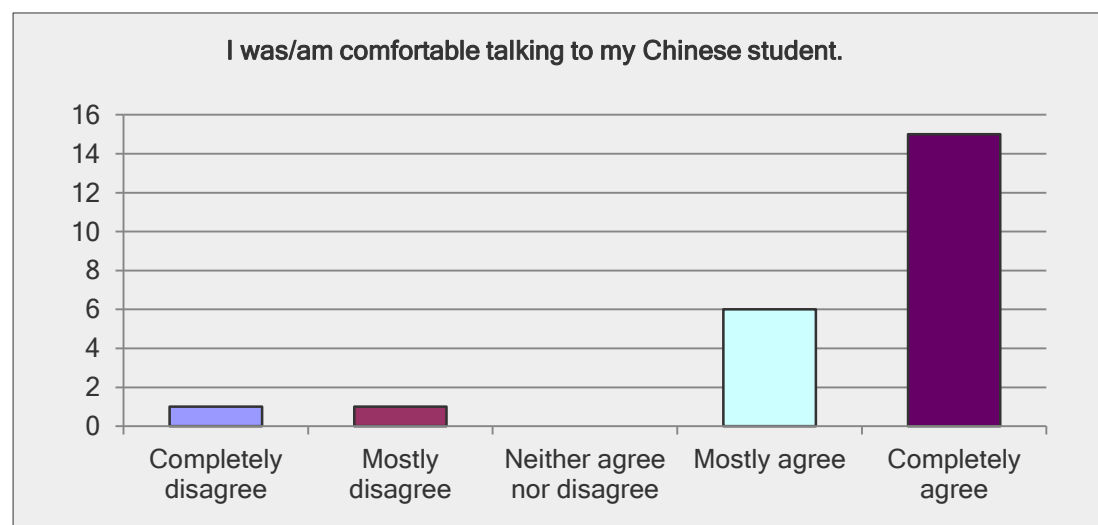
relationships in their supervision. Three Chinese students skipped this question, and none of them made any comments. But six supervisors made comments. While three supervisors restated that they agreed with this statement, another three supervisors explained why they mostly disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed, two supervisors somewhat believed that the unfriendly supervisory relationship was caused by their students and one supervisor thought that he/she was putting too much pressure on his/her students in the supervisory relationship.

- Students and supervisors were asked whether they feel comfortable talking to each other. Results are shown in Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2

Figure 2.1



Figure 2.2



A total of 19 Chinese students and 21 supervisors mostly agreed or completely agreed with this statement, indicating that 76% of students and 91.3% of supervisors felt they were comfortable talking in their supervisory relationship. Again, three students skipped this question and five supervisors made comments. While three supervisors explained why they agreed with the statement, there were two supervisors who revealed the differences between them and their Chinese students. One supervisor said that sometimes she/he had difficulty understanding her/his Chinese student, and another one pointed out that this statement was hard for her to answer. She said, “there is a whole lot of potential for getting the relationship wrong in terms of style of supervision, I work a lot with students from across the Asian continent and think that there are lots of things I just don’t know”. However, she did not expand on the context of this particular student.

- Students and supervisors were asked how they regard each other’s role in the supervisory relationship. Results are shown in Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.1

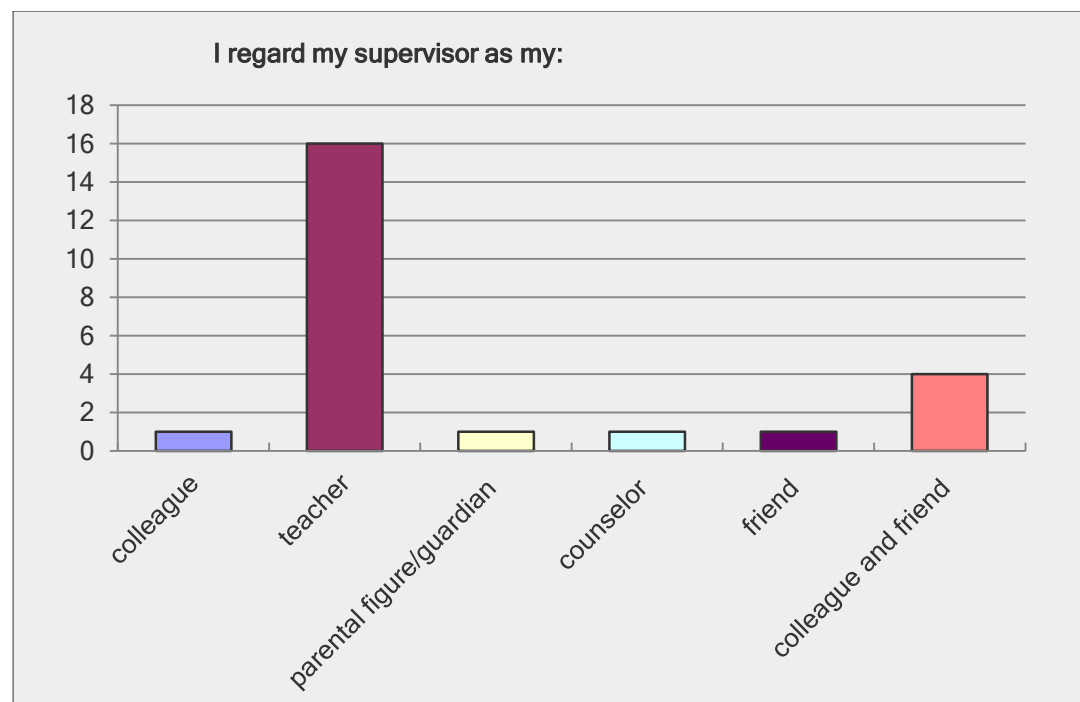
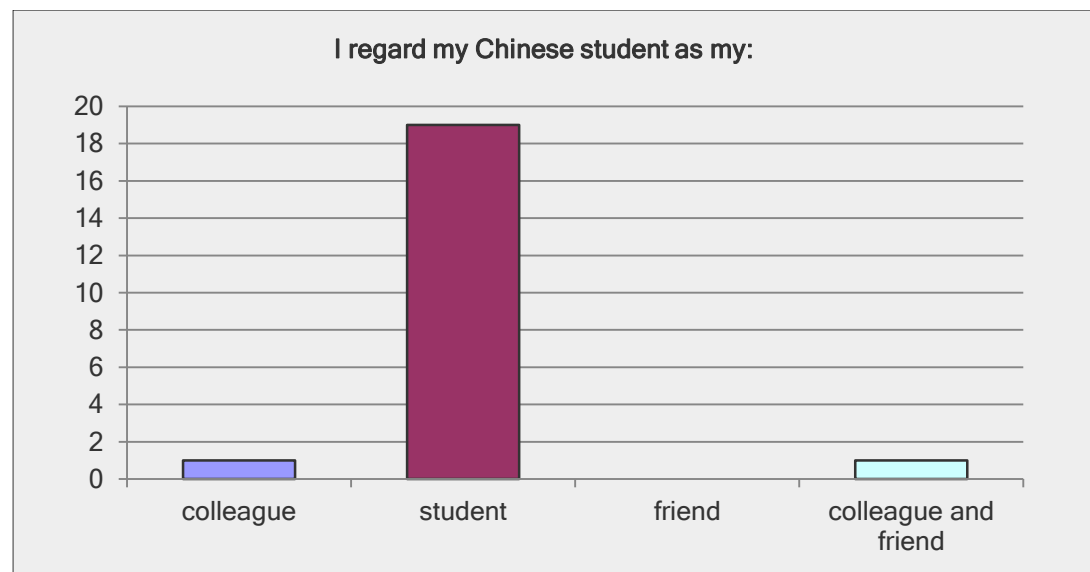


Figure 3.2



In this statement, four Chinese students and two supervisors chose not to answer the questions. The majority of Chinese students and the majority of supervisors who responded to the statements considered that their supervisory relationship was a student-teacher relationship, signifying 66.7% of students and 90.5% of supervisors shared this perception in their supervisory relationship in New Zealand. However, two students responded differently, with one indicating that they regarded their supervisor as their counsellor, colleague and friend, and the other indicating they regarded their supervisor as their teacher, parent and friend. There were eight supervisors who also clarified their answers to this question. Primarily, they all regarded their students as their students, but six of them explained that they and their students might become academic friends or colleagues during the supervisory process or when the students had completed their degree. Although both Chinese students and supervisors considered the supervisory relationship was a student-teacher relationship in this context, the relationship is more complex than it would appear and this will be discussed in more detail in the discussion chapter.

- Students were asked whether their supervisors' advice on their study was helpful (Figure 4.1) and the supervisors were asked whether their Chinese students followed their advice (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.1

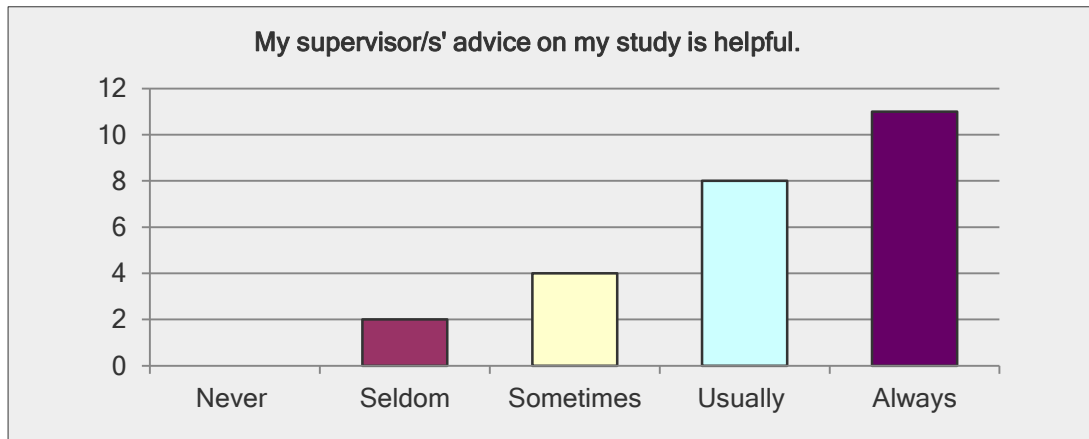
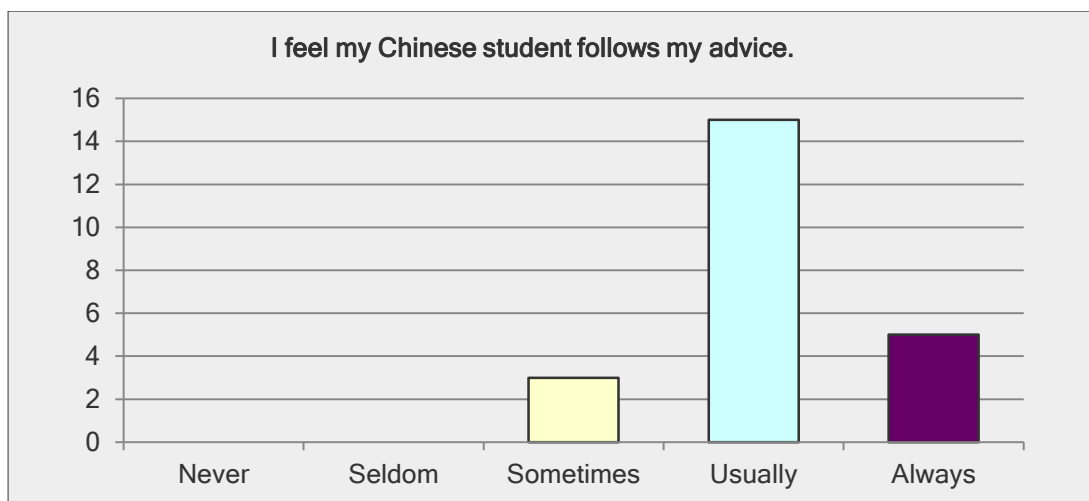


Figure 4.2



A total of 19 Chinese students and 20 supervisors responded 'Usually' or 'Always' to this statement, indicating that 76% of students thought that their supervisors' advice was useful and 86.9% of supervisors felt their Chinese students followed their advice. There were also 16% of students and 13% of supervisors who said "Sometimes", and 8% of students who said "Seldom". None of the students made a comment, but six supervisors pointed out that they expected their students to follow the advice they had given.

However, they also accepted that it was student's choice whether they wanted to follow the advice or not.

- Students and supervisors were asked whether students should ask for advice on personal problems not related to the study. Results are shown in Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2

Figure 5.1

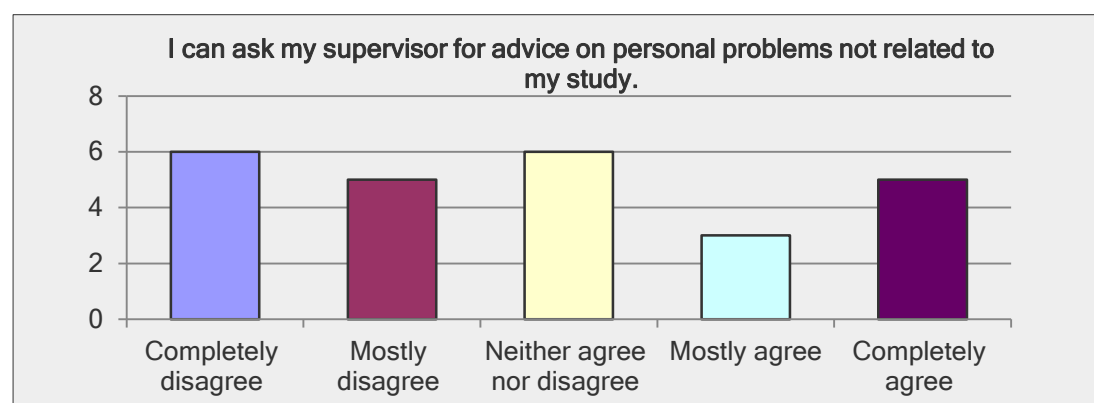
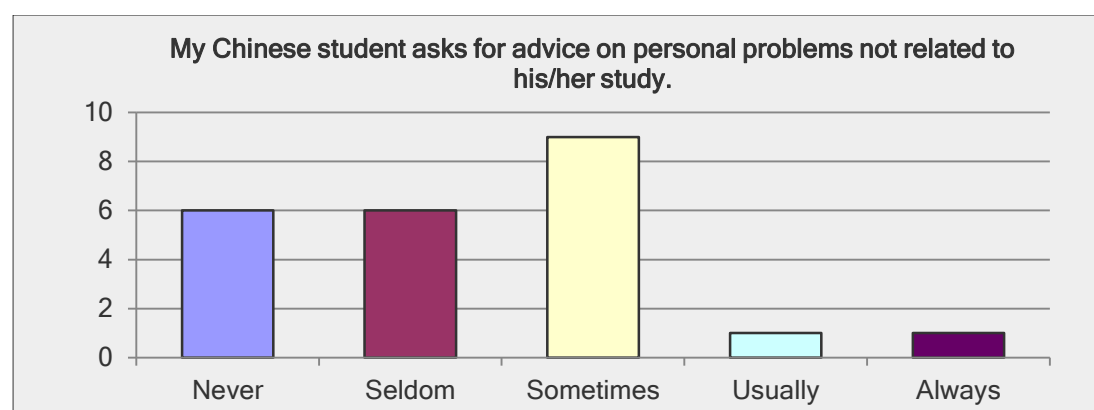


Figure 5.2



In response to this statement, 44% of the Chinese students completely disagreed or mostly disagreed that they could ask their supervisor for personal advice, and 52.2% of supervisors said their Chinese student never or seldom asked for advice on personal problems not related to the study. There were 24% of Chinese students who neither agreed nor disagreed about the statement, and 39.1% of supervisors who said "Sometimes" in response to this statement. Four supervisors commented on this

statement; one of the supervisors said if her/his Chinese students had personal difficulties that were interfering with their work, she/he would not mind giving advice. It appeared that Chinese students' perceptions on asking about personal issues were quite different from supervisors' perceptions, as Chinese students tended to ask their supervisors for personal advice or help. This will be discussed further in the discussion chapter.

4.2.2.2 Cultural differences

- Students and supervisors were asked about the time involved in the supervisory practice. Results are shown in Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.1

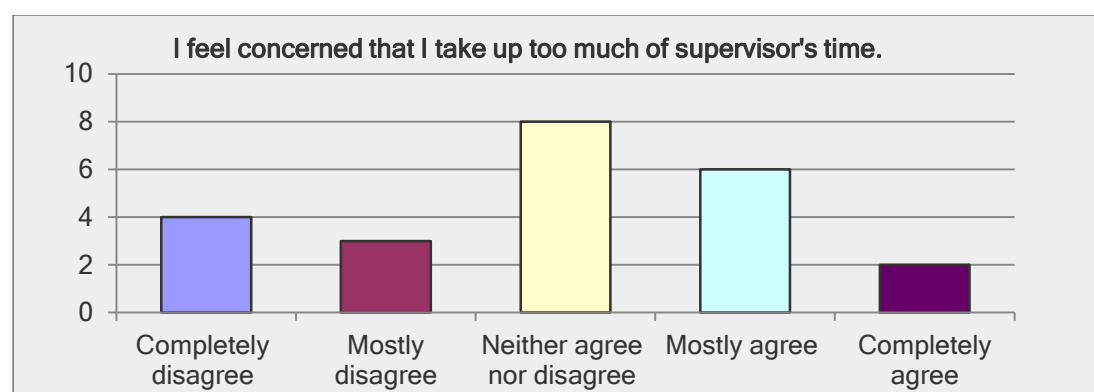
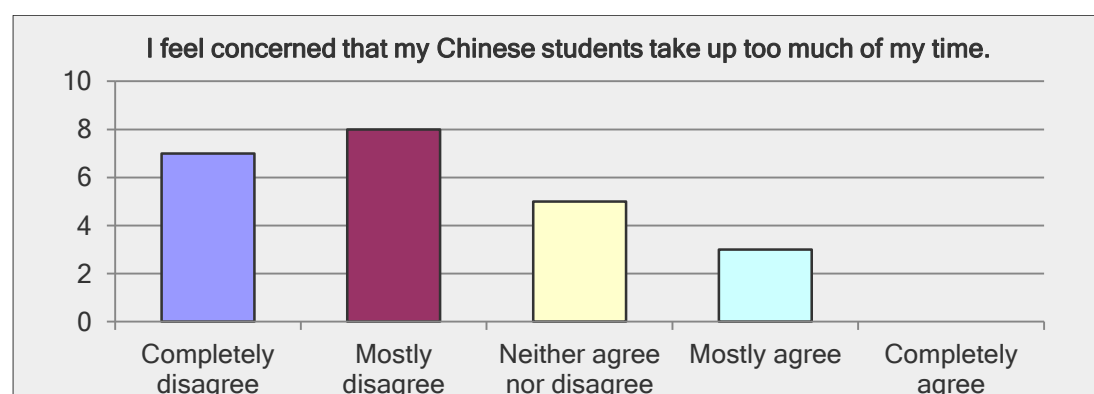


Figure 6.2



There were 5 Chinese students who did not respond to this question. A total of 30.4% of the students disagreed that they had taken up too much of the supervisors' time; 34% of the students neither agreed nor disagreed; and 34.8% of the students mostly agreed with

the statement. While 65% of the supervisors' disagreed and 21.7% of the supervisors neither agreed nor disagreed, only 13% of the supervisors agreed that their Chinese students had taken too much of their time. Two supervisors explained why they agreed with this statement; one supervisor said that "reading a great number of iterations" of the student's work was quite time consuming; and another one said he/she had to deal with students' personal issues which were very time consuming. This is one of the biggest issues of the supervisory relationship which is shown in the literature, many students do not think that they are taking too much time of their supervisors' time, instead they often complain that they do not get enough time and support from their supervisors, and supervisors think that students need to be more independent. This will be discussed in detail in the discussion.

- Students were asked whether they could tell their supervisors if they disagreed with their supervisors (Figure 7.1), and the supervisors were asked whether they found it easy to tell their Chinese students if they disagreed with them (Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.1

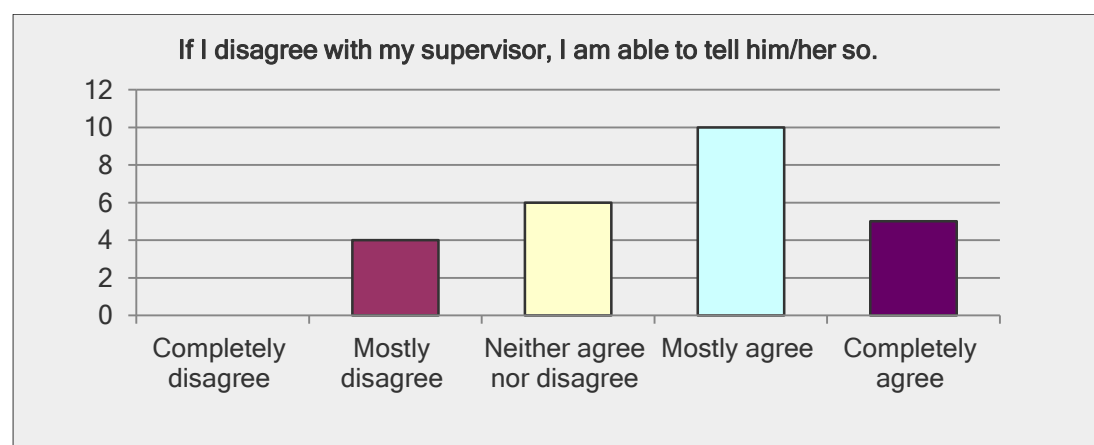
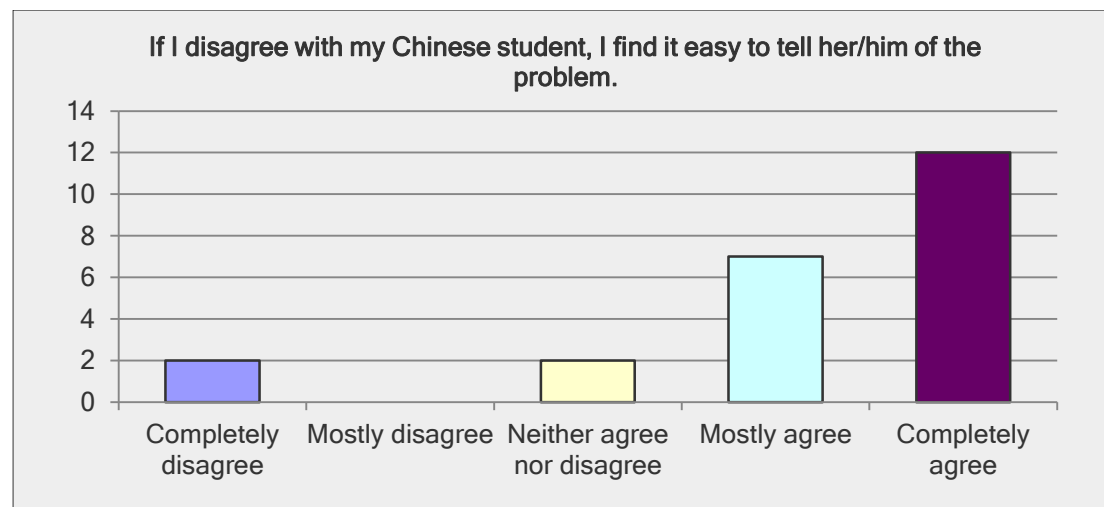


Figure 7.2



Disagreement can be quite face threatening, particularly in Chinese culture which was mentioned in the literature review. Although the result shows that 60% of Chinese students and 82.6% of supervisors agreed with the statements, there were still 16% of students who mostly disagreed and 8.2% of supervisors who completely disagreed. Five supervisors commented on this statement: one thought that he/she could have pointed out the good parts of the thesis before he/she tackled the areas that he/she thought were problematic; one was expecting the Chinese students to disagree if he/she was wrong; and two supervisors said they felt it relatively easy to tell their students about the issues. It appears that speaking directly was not problematic for either party; however, the results shown in the interviews are somewhat different from the results in this context. This will be discussed in the discussion chapter.

- Students and supervisors were asked whether they felt they were respected. Results are shown in Figure 8.1 and Figure 8.2.

Figure 8.1

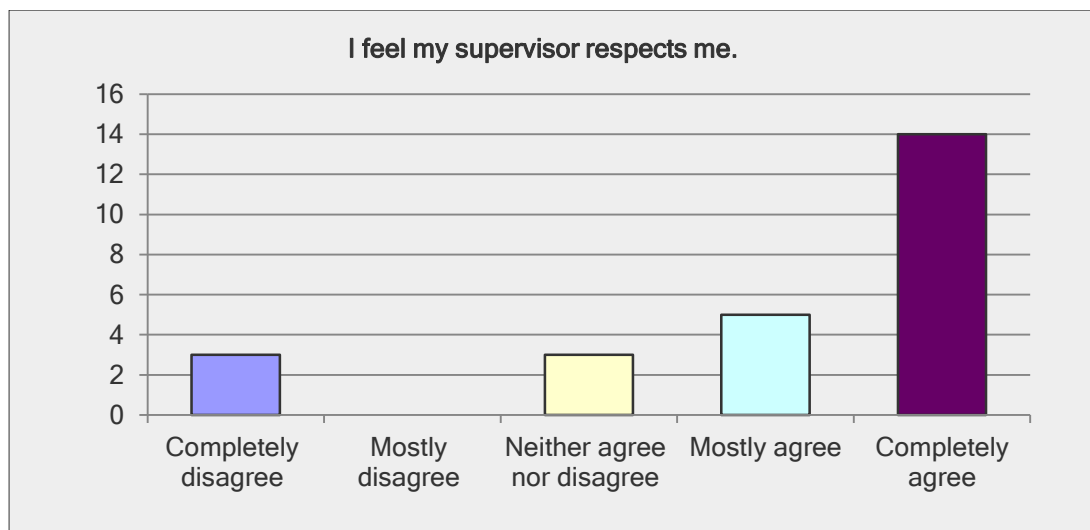
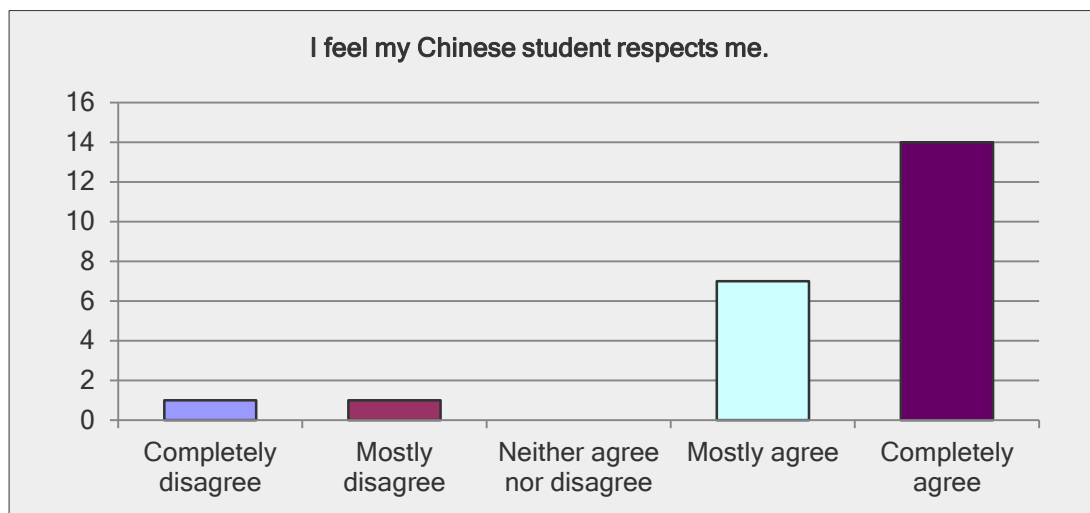


Figure 8.2



In response to this, both the Chinese students and supervisors had similar views of being respected by each other: a total of 76% students and 91.3% of supervisors agreed. Two supervisors explained why they disagreed: one said one of her Chinese students “didn’t respect anyone from outside of her particular cadre circle” which was the student’s cultural background; and another one said she “had a lot of problems in this respect” with one male Chinese student who thought himself to “have all the answers and know the best”. If students or supervisors do not respect each other, it is likely to have a

negative effect on the success of the supervisory relationship and the end result of the thesis.

- Students and supervisors were asked whether they felt their culture was respected. Results are shown in Figure 9.1 and Figure 9.2

Figure 9.1

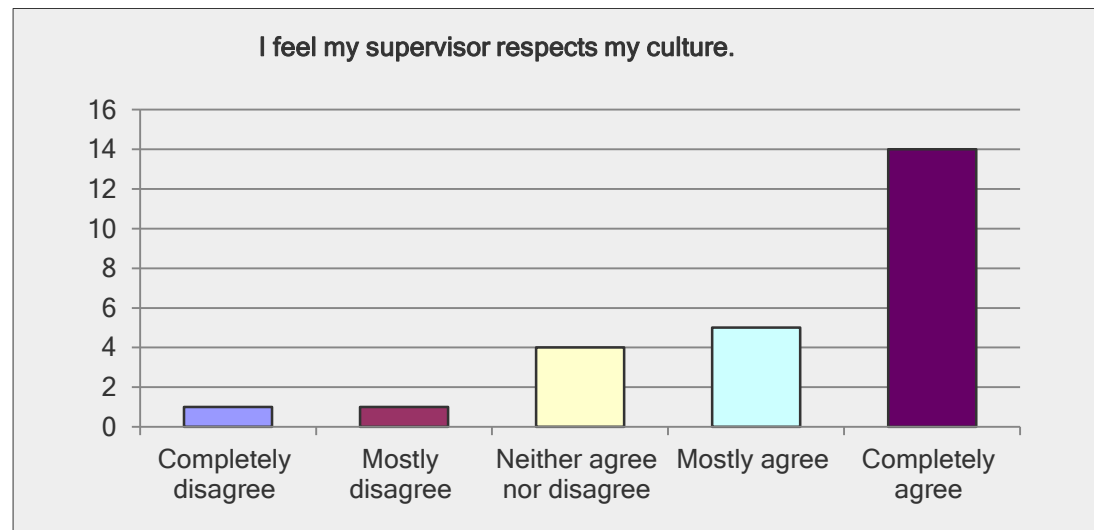
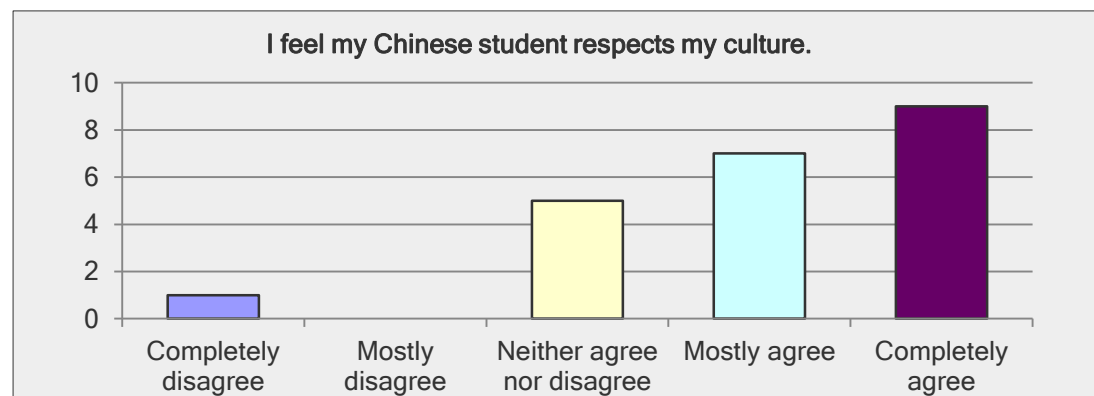


Figure 9.2



Again in response to this statement, both Chinese students and supervisors had similar views respecting each other's culture: a total of 86% of students and 72.7% of supervisors agreed. There were also 16% of students and 22.7% of supervisors who neither agreed nor disagreed. Although four students and one supervisor skipped the question, four supervisors pointed out that they had observed the cultural differences

between them and their Chinese students. One supervisor commented that one (the same supervisor noted of the same student) of her Chinese students “did not respect anyone from outside of her particular cadre circle and felt that whatever the Mainland Chinese government said about China and Chinese culture was far superior to Western culture”. One supervisor pointed out that the respect for culture should be mutual from both parties, and another mentioned that one of the Chinese students perhaps had not been respectful to the participants in the study according to Western standards but did not regard the behaviour as disrespectfulness with his/her own culture. It appears that the majority of students and supervisors in this context have no cultural misunderstanding, but there are a number of issues regarding intercultural misunderstandings in the interviews which will be discussed in the discussion chapter.

- Students and supervisors were asked whether they felt comfortable indicating that they had not understood what the other had said. Results are shown in Figure 10.1 and Figure 10.2.

Figure 10.1

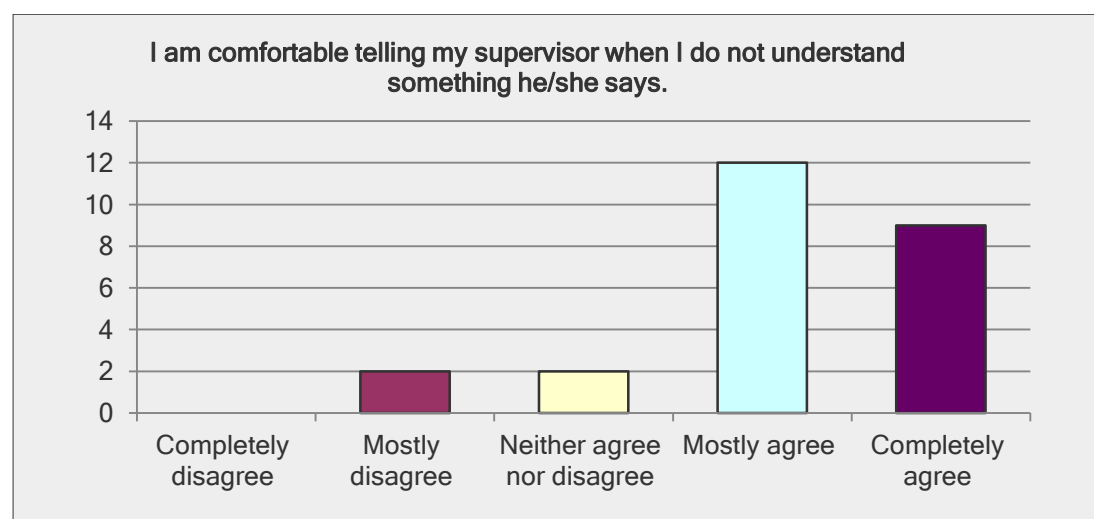
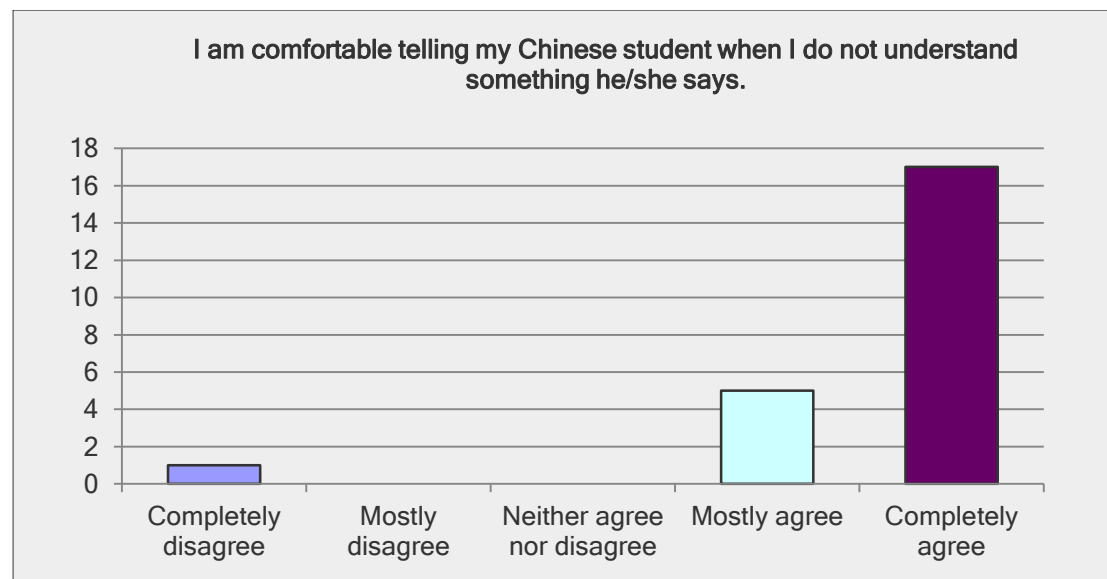


Figure 10.2



The majority of the Chinese students and the supervisors agreed with the statement: the main differences were between “Mostly agree” and “Completely agree”. In total, 48% of the Chinese students mostly agreed and 36% completely agreed, whereas 21.7% of supervisors mostly agreed and 73.9% completely agreed. Three supervisors commented on the question: one said it was important to give feedback “in order to prevent communication breakdowns”; another one said that there were few problems for her/him in understanding what the Chinese students said although it was sometimes difficult to understand what the students wrote; and another one thought that misunderstanding might not be the language issue as it could be “when anyone is explaining something on which they are more expert than I am”. From the context of the interview, it becomes apparent that language is an issue in the supervisory relationship between the Chinese students and their supervisors.

- Students and supervisors were asked whether they thought that their different cultural backgrounds made the supervisory relationship difficult. Results are shown in Figure 11.1 and Figure 11.2

Figure 11.1

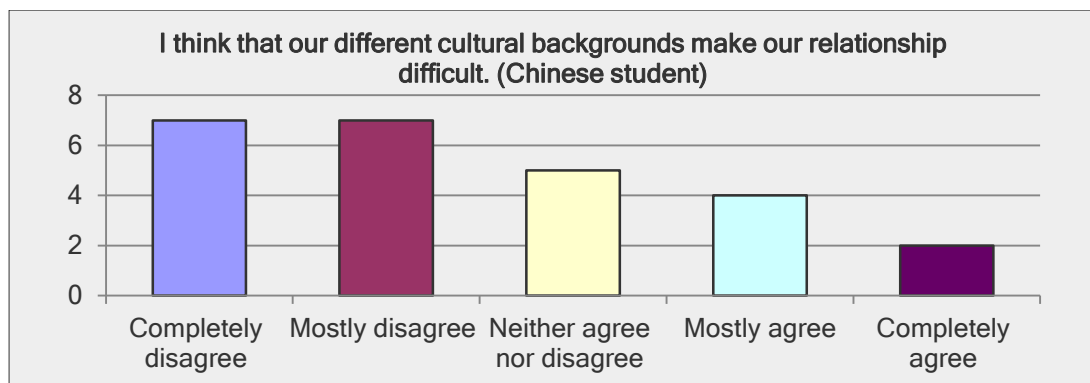
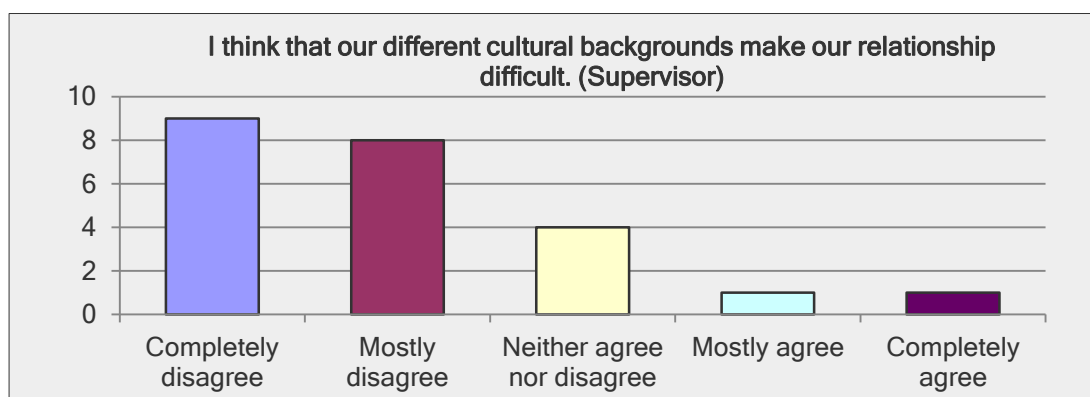


Figure 11.2



In answer to this, although 56% of Chinese students and 73.9% of supervisors disagreed that their different cultural background would make the supervisory relationship difficult, there were still 20% of students and 17.4% of supervisors who were not sure about the answer, and 24% of students and 8.6% of supervisors who agreed with the statements. Five supervisors gave their opinions on this statement. Three supervisors mentioned they had some understanding of Chinese culture: one felt that he/she was fortunate to have this Chinese student who “has a thoughtful and critical approach to academic work which I have not always found in people with Eastern education, or even a NZ one”. The responses to this statement not only indicated that the different cultural backgrounds might be a complicating factor of intercultural supervision, but also indicated that possibly stereotype viewing of Chinese students as not able to think critically might be a problem in intercultural supervision.

4.2.2.3 Advantages and Challenges

The last two questions were open-ended. The aim was to find out the advantages and challenges involved in the supervision.

- The Chinese students were asked “What are the advantages of being supervised by an English-speaking supervisor?” and supervisors were asked “What are the advantages of supervising Chinese students?”

A total of 22 students responded to the question: eleven students felt that the supervisors helped them to consider their studies from a different perspective, nine students stated that the advantages of being supervised by an English-speaking supervisor were to improve their English and to help them to write a better thesis, and two students specified that they did not see any advantages of being supervised by an English-speaking supervisor.

There were 19 supervisors who responded to the question: eight supervisors stated that their Chinese students were generally hard working, driven, and focused; four supervisors stated that their Chinese students were not different from other students from other countries or cultures; four supervisors stated that they had no opinions on this question and one of them mentioned that the question was like saying this one is good and that one is bad; two supervisors responded that their Chinese students were friendly and respectful; and only one supervisor indicated that the advantages of supervising Chinese students were “enhancing cultural knowledge and intercultural communication for both parties developing the reputation of the University”.

It appears that supervisors who could provide useful advice and language support were very important for Chinese students, and students who had positive attitudes toward

their work were an essential aspect as indicated by supervisors in the interviews of this study.

- The Chinese students were asked “What are the challenges of being supervised by an English-speaking supervisor?” and supervisors were asked “What are the challenges of supervising Chinese students?”

There were 22 students who responded to the question: 20 (90%) students identified that language and cultural differences were the main challenges for them in their supervisory relationship; some of them also mentioned that communication was not always easy because it could cause misunderstandings; and one of them pointed out that he/she sometimes felt he/she was being discriminated against by the supervisor because of the language issue. Two students said that there was no challenge for them.

A total of 20 supervisors responded to the question: 15 (75%) supervisors identified that linguistic and cultural differences were the main challenges for them in the supervisory relationship, and some of them mentioned the intercultural communication issue as well. There were also two supervisors who thought that making sure their students stick to the schedule and complete the thesis was the challenge; two supervisors were not sure about the question, and one supervisor felt that interpersonal difference was the challenge.

One of the significant findings in this question was that the majority of Chinese students and supervisors identified linguistic and cultural differences, as well as intercultural communication issues as the challenges in their supervisory relationship. However, in the earlier section of the questionnaire, most of the students and supervisors indicated that they did not have any issues in this regard. This difference was investigated in the interviews.

4.3 Interview findings

4.3.1 Introduction

This section reports on the interviews with the Chinese students and the supervisors based on the issues which were identified in the survey: the linguistic and cultural differences, and the intercultural communication issues as challenges in their supervisory relationships.

A total of ten students and ten supervisors agreed to be interviewed. All student and supervisor interviewees' demographics are shown separately in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3: Chinese student interviewee demographics

Students	Age Range	Gender	No. of years in NZ	Disciplines
1	50 +	M	12 years	MA in Applied Linguistics
2	20-29	F	5 years	MA in Health
3	20-29	F	2 years	MA in Dental Technology
4	30-39	M	11 months	PhD in Applied Linguistics
5	20-29	M	1 year	PhD in Geology
6	30-39	M	11 years	PhD in Psychology
7	30-39	F	3 years	PhD in Applied Linguistics
8	30-39	F	3 years	PhD in Applied Linguistics
9	20-29	F	1½ months	PhD in Applied Linguistics
10	30-39	M	8 years	MA in Psychology

A total of nine students were in the age range of 20-39 years old, and only one student was over 50 years old. This study therefore represents views of a group of mostly 20-39 year old Chinese-speaking students. There were five male and five female students who

had lived in New Zealand for various periods, and they represented a variety of disciplines available at New Zealand universities. At the time of the interview, two had completed their theses, and eight were in different stages of supervision.

Table 4: English-speaking supervisor interviewee demographics

Supervisors	Age Range	Gender	No. of Chinese students	Disciplines (Role)
1	60 +	M	5 or more	Business (Professor)
2	50-59	M	5 or more	Applied Linguistics (Dr)
3	40-49	F	1	Law (Dr)
4	40-49	F	2	Accounting and Commercial Law (Dr)
5	60+	M	5 or more	Business (Senior lecturer)
6	50-59	F	3	Accounting and Commercial Law (Associate professor)
7	60 +	M	5 or more	Applied Linguistics (Professor)
8	60 +	M	5 or more	Applied Linguistics (Associate Professor)
9	60 +	F	4	Education (Professor)
10	50-59	F	4	Applied Linguistics (Dr)

A total of five supervisors were over 60 years old, and five supervisors were in the age range of 40 to 59 years old. As postgraduate supervisors need to be experienced, the age range is not surprising for this group in the study. There was an even number of male and female supervisor interviewees who were professors or holding doctorates from various disciplines. Seven supervisors had supervised four or more Chinese students at New Zealand universities, and the other three supervisors had supervised between one

and three Chinese students. It appears that all supervisors had experience in supervising Chinese students.

Although the Chinese students and the supervisor participants were not matched, the findings that come from the two cohorts are presented together because the issues that emerged from the interview data are quite similar for both groups. The data is grouped into four categories: supervision, cultural differences, language issues, and communication issues.

4.3.2 Supervision

Overall, nine Chinese student interviewees said that they were happy with their supervisors, one was not satisfied with the first supervisor so he asked to change to another supervisor, and he was very satisfied with the second one. They described the relationship they had with their supervisors as ranging from “not too bad” to “very good”. They said that their supervisors were “nice”, “respectful”, “friendly”, and “they have a sense of responsibility towards their students”. On the other hand, while seven supervisor interviewees said they had no issues with their Chinese students, three supervisors had some issues with one of their Chinese students; these will be discussed later in this section. In general, they described their relationship as “good” with most of their current and previous Chinese postgraduate students. There were eight out of ten supervisors who mentioned that Chinese students are very “polite”, “respectful”, “hard working”, and that “they are very easy to work with”. Overall, it appears that both the Chinese students and the supervisors were satisfied with their supervisory relationship.

4.3.2.1 Roles

As mentioned in the literature review, the roles that people perceive others in are likely to be an issue in the supervision. In this study, all Chinese students saw their supervisors as supervisors. However, one of them also considered his supervisor as his colleague, and five of them also considered their supervisors as their friends as well as their supervisors:

I think apart from him being my supervisor, I would say he also is a friend, but not that kind of close friend. You know that kind of friend who cares about you very much, where you are very close to each other, that type of friend. He just occasionally asks me about how I am doing and sometimes asks me about what is happening in China. (Student 3)

Although none of the Chinese student interviewees required their supervisors in New Zealand to act in a parental role or other similar role which they might have if their supervisors were Chinese, three of them still hoped that their supervisors could be more supportive.

If I force him to act other roles for me in the supervisory relationship, it would be unreasonable. He is a supervisor, I am not going to expect him to be perfect. If he is supervising many students at the same time, he will not have too much energy for one student. Personally, I hope he could give more psychological support, help me out with some difficulties in life, and give me a little more care, and that would be great. (Student 8)

All the supervisors saw their Chinese students only as students during the supervisory process. Three of them said they might consider their students as their academic friends or colleagues but only after the students had completed their theses. One supervisor also explained why she did not want to be friends with her students.

Well, they're students until they graduate and then they become friends or colleagues or both...I think people who are friends with their students, I've seen a bit of this, sometimes can't critique, they are afraid of ruining the friendship if they are too critical, so I would want to say 'NO', I've got to be able to do that, I've got to be absolutely honest, and sometimes the friendship relies on a bit of pretence, so no. (Supervisor 9)

There was one supervisor who did not mind taking his role broadly; he said:

We have an active research group including my students and other people's students, and we meet regularly. And then at least 3 or 4 times a year, I have what I call a pot luck dinner at my house and people come. And also we see them socially, and they invite me to their house... and we go and watch rugby together and things like that. So I socialise with them and I think that's kind of important, because it's a question of building relationships. (Supervisor 8)

From this data it appeared that students and supervisors did not always meet each other's expectations as far as their respective roles were concerned but this did not appear to be a major issue.

4.3.2.2 Expectations

In previous studies, the major issue of intercultural supervision was the different expectations between the students and supervisors. These expectations are often understood as the unspoken rules or the unwritten rules between the students and the supervisors in Western universities (Moss, 2009; Petre & Rugg, 2010). This study supports research that indicates that students and supervisors are often unaware of each other's expectations and assumptions.

Seven out of ten students did not talk about their expectations with their supervisors before entering the supervision; two out of ten students had received a booklet from their

schools after they enrolled which included what they could expect from the postgraduate supervision; but only one student had a discussion about the expectations with his supervisors. Five of those students who did not talk about their expectations knew their supervisors prior to the supervisory relationship; for four of them this was because the supervisors were their lecturers in their undergraduate studies in New Zealand; and for one of them this was because he met his supervisor who was a visiting scholar at the university in China where the student was studying.

My supervisor is a nice person; he is also a very easy-going person. I think why we are close is because I chose my own supervisor, and also I have known him since my undergraduate studies. That's why we have had a good relationship, yes, we have known each other for long time.
(Student 2)

Because my supervisor was a visiting scholar of the university where I was studying, we had only seen each other once or twice at that time, so I didn't know her very well. After I decided to pursue a Ph.D. degree in New Zealand, I wrote an email to her and she agreed to supervise me.
(Student 5)

So it appeared that when the Chinese students decided to carry on with their postgraduate studies after they completed their undergraduate studies at New Zealand universities, they tended to choose one of their lecturers whom they felt they had more connection with to be their supervisor. It also appeared that they were less likely to talk about their expectations with their supervisors after they entered the supervisory relationship because they assumed their supervisors knew what the students' needs were.

On the other side, five supervisors talked about the ground rules and their expectations with their Chinese students, and they thought that letting their students know what they expected was very important.

And you know, particularly for international students who have not studied in an English-speaking university, I think it's quite important for them to understand that they need to do it my way. Because then they will understand what the requirements and the expectations are.

(Supervisor 7)

Another five supervisors did not talk about the ground rules and their expectations with their students, because some of them had a similar situation as the Chinese student interviewees in which their students had been taught by them, so the supervisors assumed their students knew what to expect from them.

I think that all of the students that I've supervised, have classes under me, and have chosen me to be their supervisor. So they have self-selected on the basis of how I treated them in the class and I don't require obedience, I require questioning. So the students have self-selected, into a particular kind of student that feels comfortable working with me and my personality, my style, so given that situation, then you know we rarely have problems because they know what to expect. (Supervisor 1)

The result from the supervisor interviews shows that supervisors who talked about the expectations with their students tended to be demanding as they required their student to do things their way rather than just make suggestions or give advice. For those supervisors who did not talk about expectations with their students it appeared to be similar to the student interviewees' result, in that they were less likely to talk about the expectations if they knew their students before entering the supervision and they assumed their students knew what to expect.

One of the issues here is that both students and supervisors made their own assumptions and expectations of their encounters concerning what they should know, but actually they might have ignored the fact that the situation would be different between student and lecturer, and student and supervisor, as the latter relationship is a much closer

relationship than the previous one. This will be discussed further in the discussion chapter.

4.2.3.3 Availability of supervisors

The availability of the supervisors was another issue which can cause conflict during supervision. In the students' interviews, six of them had no issues with the availability of their supervisors; they had scheduled meetings once every one or two weeks to once every month, and their supervisor usually responded to their emails quite quickly as well.

At the beginning of the supervision, we met about once a week, and lately we would meet with each other, on average, once every two weeks...My supervisor has given me a feeling that if I have questions I can go see him anytime I need. He is very approachable. (Student 10)

However, three Chinese students felt that they were not given sufficient time with their supervisors. While the students have some understanding of the demand on their supervisors (e.g. supervisors were very busy, they had many other postgraduate students, they had their own research to do, and they had other commitments within their universities), they (students) still resented the lack of response to their own needs.

I was struggling with this. I don't send him any emails anymore. At the beginning of my study, I often sent him my assignments by email, but anything that was sent by email was like a pebble dropped in the sea, no reply from him... sometimes when we at a scheduled meeting, I have already got there, and he told me he had to go because he needed to do something, we needed to change to another time. In this case, I would just say 'ok, no problem, I will email you to make another time' as I am a kind of easygoing person. (Student 3)

We don't have scheduled meetings such as once every month, only when I need it...he doesn't give me advice much, he asks me to do everything

by myself...although it's a good pedagogy, I am a bit worried as I have too much of freedom. (Student 8)

Chinese students rarely changed their supervisors if their supervisors had been unreliable during the supervision, as Student 10 explained:

Personally I wouldn't change. Because it would waste too much time, and also your new supervisor may not agree with your idea, and then you have to rewrite it, you waste too much time, this costs money.

There was only one Chinese student who decided to change to another supervisor after he felt the first supervisor had been unsatisfactory during the supervision. He said:

I felt I wasn't given enough time by him. Because he was too busy, and also he was doing his own research as well as he was doing some other things, so we sometimes met once a month, and usually we met at lunch time and the meeting probably took about how long it took you to eat your sandwich. I also thought that his suggestions weren't as useful as I expected. So I decided to change.

After he changed to another supervisor, this student had a very good relationship with the second supervisor. He said:

He knew the area of my research very well and he understood what I wanted to do in my thesis, and he gave me a lot of time so we could talk about my research in detail.

It appeared that all students needed to spend sufficient time with their supervisors in order for them to develop a sense of security, no matter whether they were confident and competent students or not.

In comparison with the students' views, all supervisors said they had given their students enough time. Eight out of ten supervisors met their students once a week to once a month, depending on which stage their students were at; at some stages they might meet

with their students more often; or they might just meet them once a month. Two supervisors did not mention how many times they met their students.

You know a student of lower competence is going to require a different supervisory process than an extremely competent confident one...if the student's weak, then no matter where they're from, they require more close supervision. (Supervisor 1)

I get students coming from many disciplines, from many faculties and schools, and I do hear that (supervisors do not give enough time to their students). And I just think that's absolutely unacceptable, irresponsible, on the part of supervisors. Look, I mean, it doesn't mean that you have to meet with them regularly. (Supervisor 7)

From what the supervisors said, it appeared that if the students were confident and competent, the supervisors could give less time to the students. Also if they did not meet with their students regularly it did not mean that they were irresponsible.

Although 70% of student interviewees felt they were given enough time by their supervisors, and 80% of supervisor interviewees felt they had given their students enough time, the issue of the availability of the supervisors was still a problem for some students and this reflected on other issues in the supervisory relationship which will be discussed later.

4.2.3.4 Feedback and disagreement

All students had been given feedback by their supervisors. However, seven out of ten students had somewhat disagreed with their supervisors on occasions, but they had most likely used indirect ways to disagree.

I have used a very indirect way to express my point of view. I wouldn't say 'this is no good, and I don't agree with you'. I would say something

like ‘do you think this way could be better’ and I would tell him why I think this way is better. (Student 1)

Three students had not expressed any disagreement with their supervisors during their supervision.

I don’t think I have a lot to argue with him about, this kind of situation rarely happened. After all, he is much more advanced than me, I have lots of things in my field I don’t know, and my knowledge is too shallow ... so it’s hard for me to know if what he said was right or wrong. (Student 3)

The stereotype of Chinese students in the previous studies might be they are quiet, passive or lacking in critical thinking (see Chapter 2.2.4); however, most Chinese students in this study were quite talkative in the interview, they were quite critical about the higher education system in China and Chinese-speaking supervisors, and they were also critical about the issues concerning international students. Some of them were extremely critical about the supervisory relationship either in China or in New Zealand. Those who did not disagree with their supervisors said that it was not because they lacked the ability to think critically, but they did not have enough knowledge to debate, or they had limited language proficiency to make the argument and to clearly express their point of view.

All supervisors provided feedback to their students. However, two supervisors said their Chinese students were less likely to disagree with them, and they usually were quiet in the discussion. One supervisor pointed out that he required questioning not obedience, and one supervisor required his students to do things his way.

Three out of ten supervisors had a problem with students who disagreed a lot but did not express their disagreement either face to face or in writing. Instead, the students appeared to agree with them in the meetings:

We had a lot of problems with him agreeing with us, and then going away and doing something completely different. And I don't tend to get that with other students. He would always agree with us, and we used to write down on a piece of paper, we always minuted all the meetings very carefully, this is what we want you to do, and then he'd say "Right", and then go away, and he wouldn't do it. (Supervisor 6)

Five out of ten supervisors mentioned that there was some disagreement between them and their students during the discussion, but some of the disagreements were very productive.

The one who has completed, she's done a brilliant PhD, ... when she's with me, I don't know, she argued really ... and we have really entered the academic discussions and we've learned from each other, but we did get passionate when they're engaged in some the issues, often in terms of the theories, and the things... (Supervisor 8)

It appeared that some supervisors did not mind their students disagreeing with them, in fact, they enjoyed their students arguing their case. However, some supervisors did not seem to like their students disagreeing with them; they had what appeared to be an arrogant attitude as Supervisor 7 expressed: "I am a professor and I actually supervise many many students, if you don't take my advice, why come and study with me?" This could be one of the reasons why Chinese students were quiet or reluctant to disagree with their supervisors.

4.3.3 Cultural differences

The interviews have shown that many issues in the supervisory relationship were caused by cultural differences. Nine students identified cultural differences between them and their supervisors. One of the students said she was really uncomfortable calling her supervisor by his first name, even though she had been asked to. It made her feel she was not showing proper respect to her supervisor. Another one said her supervisor would chat and joke with English-speaking students, but the supervisor had never talked like that with her and she was not sure why. One student remarked that when he was being modest, one of the supervisors did not recognise the Chinese cultural trait of modesty.

One day, we had a meeting to talk about my PhD proposal. Before the meeting, I was really busy reading and preparing the summary, after I had written a summary of the literature review, I sent it to them. When we met on the day, I said to them I haven't done much this week, but actually, it's not that I hadn't done much, I was just being modest. My second supervisor suggested I go to the student learning centre and see if they could help me to sort out my time management, and so on. But my first supervisor said to the second supervisor, "I think he has done a lot of work, you can see the amount of work he has done would take more than a few days." (Student 4)

Two out of nine students identified cultural differences, but they thought that cultural differences were not the main issue of their supervision.

I personally think that cultural difference is not the main issue among postgraduate students at NZ universities, because we usually use English to communicate with our supervisor, all we talk about is related to the academic work... I think the impact of cultural differences in this respect is not significant. (Student 1)

Student 6 said that “there is no cultural difference between us (him and his supervisor) either in academic or in everyday life”. However, in the interview, he talked about the fact that he had to be very careful about disagreeing with his supervisor because Western academics did not like students to be direct; he talked about the fact that he had to think a lot before the discussion and then speak slowly so that his supervisor could understand what he said; he also talked about the situation where he would not worry about saving face in a Western supervision as he would do in a Chinese supervision. It appeared that despite his first statement, all he actually talked about were the cultural differences between him and his supervisor. The implication of his views will be expanded and discussed in the discussion chapter.

On the supervisors’ side, seven out of ten supervisor interviewees identified cultural differences, but they were most likely to look at the issues as a personality issue rather than a cultural difference.

I guess it’s more individual difference than a cultural difference, more a personality difference than a cultural difference. (Supervisor 1)

I think the problems we’ve had with him (the student) have just been because of who he is, nothing to do with being Chinese. I know British people like that. (Supervisor 6)

Three supervisors said that they were not sure about the cultural differences between them and their Chinese students.

As I said, we’re trying to keep it structured by giving him quite a list of what we want him to do. But I am not sure that’s working sometimes...I am not sure whether it’s personality or whether it’s a Chinese (culture). (Supervisor 4)

I would say I don't know. ...B (student's name), for example, has been very forthcoming in explaining cultural differences to me, and we've worked together since she graduated, and we were interested in precisely working on some of the Chinese cultural phenomenon around education. But I don't know what I don't know. (Supervisor 9)

It appeared that both students and supervisors were aware of the cultural differences that exist in the supervisory relationship. However, they did not see that issues caused by language or intercultural communication are also part of cultural differences. This will be discussed further in the discussion chapter.

4.3.3.1 Face issues

The concept of "Face" is widely recognised in Chinese culture and this can be an issue between the students and supervisors as pointed out in previous studies (see 2.2.2). In this study, six students said that they did not have any issues of losing face during their supervision. However, one of them even went so far as to say, "If you want to save face, you can't do your PhD". They did not think that the supervisors' criticism or suggestion would make them lose face. In fact, they thought it was normal for supervisors to give criticism or suggestions. Four students had face issues at the beginning of their supervision; however, once they and their supervisors got to know each other, they were less likely to feel they were losing face.

Sometime I felt I was losing face because if a word is very important and I don't know, I have to ask my supervisor. (Student 3)

I don't feel that (losing face) anymore now... I used to feel embarrassed when I didn't understand what he (supervisor) said, I wouldn't ask, I would just let it go without clarifying...I am no longer feeling embarrassed when I didn't understand what he said, and I am over that now. (Student 8)

It appeared that face issues do exist in the supervisory relationship. However, Chinese students in this particular group have possibly adapted to the Western academic culture relatively fast as losing face did not appear to be an issue for them in this study, but the result in this study cannot be generalised in Chinese students.

All supervisor interviewees were aware of the concept of “face” in Chinese culture. But six of them felt they did not understand it very well.

I think I probably don't understand it very well. I've heard about it and I do understand that people interact with people differently and it's a cultural issue, possibly it could be useful to know more about it, but it hasn't, as far as I know, been necessary. (Supervisor 3)

I have heard of it and of the need to be aware of it for us mortals from other parts of the world. And I must confess I am little bit anxious that I might not have been sufficiently sensitive on occasion. (Supervisor 5)

The remaining four supervisors understood it well. However, one of them said:

Students are uncomfortable when they are put in a position where they lose face, but if you're going to go to school in NZ, Australia, UK, and that's where you go to school, and you have to behave in a way that allows you to fit into that academic culture in that country. So if you get overly concerned about losing face, then you're not paying attention to the right thing. You'll learn how to maintain the face... It's important in China, we're not in China. It's important to Chinese, but if you're going to operate outside of China, you have to develop a flexible attitude towards giving and receiving face. (Supervisor 1)

The results appear to show that on the one hand, the supervisors knew of and acknowledged the concept of face, which is important in Chinese culture. On the other hand, the results also appear to show that even though they were aware of the cultural differences, the concept of face might be important in China but not in New Zealand,

particularly in Western academic culture. Students should be made aware of this before coming to study in New Zealand.

4.3.3.2 Praise from supervisors

Praise in Chinese culture is rare, especially in educational circumstances; teachers are less likely to praise their students because they worry that too much praise will inflate the students' egos. Some students also identified this difference in the interview.

The design of my experiment wasn't quite right, but at that time there was no way I could change the design and redo it, he (supervisor) didn't criticise me and he just said 'when you write up your discussion, you could add a couple of sentences to sum up the weakness of your experiment' ... Unlike us (Chinese supervisor), we probably would say something like 'you are no good', or 'your thesis has a problem', or other negative comments. I would say he has never said anything which is negative, and it has never happened. (Student 3)

During the past year I have been here, she has been consistently giving me praise and encouragement, but I'm not sure about whether she is just encouraging me or she really does think I am doing really well...My Chinese supervisor never praised me or encouraged me. (Student 5)

Six student interviewees in this study mentioned that they were happy when they were praised or encouraged by their supervisors. Even though they might have had doubts whether the praise was real or not, it still appeared that praise was a powerful tool to make students motivated, more confident, and more inclined to tackle challenges.

When I show him my experimental results, 80% of the time I don't know whether he is comforting me or not, he would say to me 'good'. Well, he always says 'good' to me, encourages me and praises me. So every time when he says that, it makes me feel better and my stress seems to be not so high like before, and it also keeps me going with my thesis. (Student 3)

My supervisor thinks me a perfect PhD student, I am so happy and fulfilled about what she said. (Student 9)

Despite the fact that the question was not designed for both students' and supervisors' interview questionnaires, students identified the differences while they were talking, so none of the supervisors was asked how they felt about praising their students. However, it was apparent in the supervisors' views that not all supervisors were likely to say negative things about their students. Even though there were issues in their supervisory relationship, they tended to say more positive things about their students rather than focusing on the negative. It appeared that praising students is one of the strategies of Western pedagogy.

4.3.4 Language issues

Language is most likely to be the main challenge for Chinese students in the Western academy. All Chinese student interviewees had language issues: three out of ten students said they had a problem in speaking English, especially with colloquial English, slang and idioms, English names, and so on. Seven out of ten students had problems with both spoken and written English.

I took a long time to get my confidence in speaking English. I've been here for three years, half the time I was getting adapted to the language... To write up a logical thesis is the biggest challenge for me. (Student 8)

I think the biggest challenge is my writing. I also have concerns about the conference presentations, because it's one-way communication, although I only need to speak 15-20 minutes on stage, it seems like a very long time for me. Unlike speaking English, I am able to express my thoughts freely without thinking too much by using Chinese. Besides, I

would sometimes forget the words in English or how to say them.

(Student 4)

I don't think I can talk to him like Kiwis, my English hasn't reached that level yet. It's impossible for me to communicate with him like that, I still have language issues...I have issues in writing in English. (Student 3)

Sometimes when I tried to express my thoughts, but I just couldn't say it as I didn't know how to say...Yes, I have difficulty in writing as well.

(Student 2)

In the supervisor interviews, two supervisors did not find that their students had any language issues with their students. Eight supervisors talked about language issues that their students had, but most of the problems were related to their written English.

I have said their failure to understand the importance of producing a technically correct thesis or dissertation in terms of language, most of them know how to study and produce work but those that have been less successful are those who have not taken my advice on producing a grammatically, correctly spelled, correctly formatted thesis which is unfortunate because that's such an easy thing to do. I had one student that just refused to do that, and then as a result was unable to get into PhD programme after his MPhil thesis was marked down due to poor English. (Supervisor 1)

They can have articles all over the place, and they can have pronouns all over the place. (Supervisor 8)

Thus, for those Chinese students who have studied in New Zealand for a longer period of time, they might have less concern about their language proficiency for understanding or speaking English. But language issues, especially in academic writing, were still a major concern for the Chinese students and the supervisors.

4.3.5 Communication issues

Although none of the students initially indicated that they had communication issues, it appeared that they did. They were more likely to think that the issues they faced during their supervisory relationship were because of different expectations, or cultural differences, or language issues such as their grammar, but they did not think that communicating their thoughts clearly to their supervisors was an issue at all.

He (student's supervisor) has never asked me about it (language struggles), and I don't think I have talked about it either...he certainly cannot understand the struggles which those students who speak English as second language have experienced. I don't think he knows. (Student 8)

I think he should feel guilty (about not giving me enough time), sometimes I really want to say something, but I think we Chinese students have more respect for our supervisors. Sometimes I do want to complain about it (but I didn't). (Student 3)

My main problem was even though I disagreed with my supervisor, I would still do it his way. Whether it's a culture difference or not, I don't know. English-speaking students probably would stick to their own opinions, but he is my supervisor I think I should listen to him and do it his way. (Student 1)

By contrast, all supervisors recognised the communication issues in the supervisory process; five supervisors had intercultural communication breakdowns but they were unsure whether it was a cultural or language issue.

Yeah, that's why I am saying there is a thing of a communication problem, a cultural problem, because if it was say one of my Kiwi PhD students, he would just turn around say 'No, I don't want to do it that way, and this is way I want to do it, and this is why'. Where I think my current Chinese PhD student feels that way, but won't say and does it

differently, tries to, what is the word, finding other ways of expressing that. Don't know how to explain that here... You know, cause sometimes you know if you don't get to them for a day or two, you sort of get 'Well, why haven't you answered them?', and I am going... or 'I want a meeting on Friday', we are going um we can't meet you on Friday, or 'I want it read by Monday' but no, that is not going to happen. (Supervisor 4)

I always make sure now with that student that I get the student to actually say back to me what I want to know, and also ask her if she wants me to write it down, and she usually doesn't, she usually makes the note herself, but on the last two occasions, she has provided what I've been wanting. So I don't really know whether it was a lack of understanding or not or whether she was just deciding that she wanted to do things her way rather than my way. (Supervisor 7)

It appeared that both the Chinese students and the supervisors might lack intercultural communication knowledge. On the one hand, students were unwilling to say what they really wanted to say, because they would be considered impolite, disrespectful, or even threatening in Chinese culture if they disagreed with their supervisor, or complained that their supervisor had not given them enough time. On the other hand, supervisors identified the differences in communicating between Kiwi students and Chinese students, but they did not understand why Chinese students did not say what they really thought. What is more was that none of the supervisors knew that the word 'want' in Chinese was actually a polite way to request something; they thought that if any student said or wrote 'I want...' to them, they would consider that as being assertive or impolite. This will be further discussed in the discussion chapter.

4.4 Summary

4.4.1 Summary of survey findings

Based on the 28 Chinese students and the 23 supervisors' responses to the questionnaires, the survey data and analysis yielded the following results:

- 88% of the students and 86% of the supervisors had friendly relationships in their supervision. As far as the roles in the supervisory relationship were concerned, the figures show that 66.7% students and 90.5% supervisors saw their relationship as a student-supervisor relationship.
- Most students thought their supervisors' academic advice was useful and they would follow the supervisors' academic advice. However, talking about personal issues was not clear-cut.
- Almost 35% of students thought they might take up too much of a supervisor's time, and 35% of the supervisors agreed with this perception.
- On average, 79% of the students and 82% of the supervisors respected each other and each other's culture, and they did not think that the different cultural backgrounds would make their relationship difficult. In addition, overall indications show that the majority of the students and supervisors had no communication issues in their supervision.
- However, in the last of the open questions, both students and supervisors identified the linguistic and cultural differences as the main challenges in their supervisory relationship.

Therefore, it seems that there were no other apparent issues apart from language and the cultural differences between the Chinese students and their English-speaking supervisors in the survey findings.

4.4.2 Summary of interview findings

The following is a summary by category of the interviews with the ten students and ten supervisors.

4.4.2.1 Supervision

Overall, both the Chinese students and the supervisors were satisfied with their supervisory relationship. They defined their relationship as a student-supervisor relationship, and this matches the survey findings. Although some students hoped for more support from their supervisors, it was not a major issue.

There are three issues under the supervision category: 1) both students and supervisors were often unaware of each other's expectations or assumptions; 2) students who had an issue with availability of the supervisors felt resentful but they would not tell their supervisors, whereas the supervisor thought that no regular meetings with their students did not mean that they were irresponsible; 3) those Chinese students who disagreed with their supervisors' opinions tended to use an indirect way to express their opinion; this showed their perception of power distance between them and their supervisors. Some supervisors did not like students to disagree with them, they liked their students to be obedient.

4.4.2.2 Cultural differences

In general, all of the Chinese students had some cultural differences with their supervisors. However, one of the students did not identify the cultural differences. Some students had Chinese ‘face’ issues during their supervision, but they were likely to very quickly adapt to the Western academic culture. The majority of the students liked to be praised and encouraged, something they found to be different from their own culture.

On the supervisors’ side, seven supervisors identified the cultural differences. However, some supervisors considered these issues during supervision as personality issues rather than cultural issues. Moreover, all supervisors were aware of the concept of ‘face’ in Chinese culture, but not all of them really understood its meaning. Some supervisors suggested that if students wanted to study in a Western academy in New Zealand, they should not worry about their ‘face’ and some students agreed with them.

4.4.2.3 Language issues

All Chinese students had language issues regardless of how long they had stayed in New Zealand. Three out of ten students said they had a problem in speaking English, especially colloquial English, slang and idioms, English names, and so on. Seven out of ten students had problems with both spoken and written English. Eight supervisors said that their students had language issues in written English, such as problems in grammar, spelling, format of the thesis, and so forth. Thus language is the major issue in the supervisory relationship; this also matched the survey results.

4.4.2.4 Communication issues

None of the Chinese students thought they had communication issues, and the issues they did encounter during supervision were most likely language issues or cultural differences. The examples given demonstrated that they were using the Chinese way to communicate with their English-speaking supervisors; this reflected the intercultural communication issues.

Contrary to this, all supervisors recognised intercultural communication issues, although five supervisors who had communication issues, were unsure whether it was a cultural or language issue. In addition, none of them knew that the impolite word “want” in English was actually often a polite word in Chinese. Thus, it appeared that both students and supervisors lacked intercultural communication knowledge either in English or in Chinese.

Therefore, the data indicated that both the students’ and the supervisors’ responses could be grouped into four categories, all of which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the discussion which draws on the findings of both the surveys and interviews presented in Chapter 4. In the survey, 28 Chinese student participants and 23 supervisor participants indicated the extent of the challenges they faced in their supervisory relationships. Following this, the ten Chinese student interviewees and ten supervisor interviewees gave a more detailed account of their experiences and thoughts in their supervision. The interviews, as intended, gave more detail about interviewees' perceptions and feelings of the supervisory relationship.

Initially, the survey findings revealed that both Chinese students and supervisors had not had many issues in their supervisory relationships; most of them claimed that everything was fine, that there was no problem between them and their supervisors or their students. However, in the interviews, both students and supervisors talked about certain issues during their supervisory relationship such as their supervisor not having enough time for them, students hoping for more support in the supervisory relationship, supervisors having trouble with students agreeing with them, and so on. Some students and supervisors appeared to have quite a strong sense of resentment, and they were reluctant to talk about it.

Second, it was apparent from both the surveys and the interviews that language was the main issue affecting the supervisory relationship between the Chinese students and their English-speaking supervisors as far as the students were concerned. Although the Chinese students had met the language entry criteria to do their postgraduate studies, it was still difficult for them to speak or write like native English speakers; in particular, it

was difficult for them to participate in any casual conversation which involved jokes, news, or a topic which could develop a closer relationship. On the other hand, the majority of supervisors did not think their students had any language issues. It was interesting to ponder whether they genuinely felt their students had no language issues, or they just did not want to say it because they did not want to be overly critical of their students' abilities to communicate, or they were not aware that the Chinese students did not always understand their jokes or certain news items they discussed.

Third, in the survey, both student and supervisor participants did not think that the cultural differences were problematic in the supervisory relationship. However, in the interview findings, the cultural differences were often shown through their thoughts, and through the examples they gave.

Finally, there were few students and supervisors who mentioned that the intercultural communication issues affected their supervisory relationship. However, intercultural communication difficulties also appeared to be one of the most problematic areas in this study.

5.2 Supervisory relationship issues

On the surface, both survey data and interview data showed that the majority of students and supervisors in this study were satisfied with their relationship. However, there appeared to be a lot of issues in the interviews, such as language issues, cultural differences, communication issues, different expectations, availability of supervisors, feedback and advice, disagreement, and power distance. Some of these issues will be discussed here.

5.2.1 Expectations

Many issues in the supervisory relationship arose because of the different expectations between students and supervisors (Eley & Jennings, 2005; Green, 2005; Hemer, 2012; Krase, 2007; Lessing & Schulze, 2003; Manathunga, 2009; Morris, Pitt, & Manathunga, 2011; Petre & Rugg, 2010; Wisker, 2005). As shown in the findings, when expectations were not clearly described at the beginning of the supervision, they sometimes developed into serious issues during the supervisory process. For example, one of the student interviewees asked to change his supervisor because he had different expectations from his supervisor: the student wanted to meet with the supervisor more regularly while the supervisor met with him only once a month; the student wanted to have proper discussions with the supervisor about his research but the discussions often took “as long as it takes to eat a sandwich”; and the student expected to receive some useful suggestions but it turned out that the supervisor’s suggestions were not considered very useful at all. However, the implication of this issue might not be the different expectations between the Chinese student and his supervisors; the problem was actually caused by a lack of communication, as this Chinese student and his supervisors had never discussed their expectations with each other at the beginning of the supervision; this issue was also observed in Krase’s (2007) study.

The interviews also demonstrated that expectations were unlikely to be discussed between the Chinese students and supervisors. The issue was also found in the Moss (2009) and Petre & Rugg (2010) studies which found the expectations are “usually unspoken and unapparent rules within the academy” (Moss, 2009, p. 73), and the unwritten rules in the research supervision have become the “tacit knowledge” for students and supervisors. They said that no one bothers to talk about the rules in the

supervision, either because “they assume you know them (rules) already, or because they are so familiar to them that they completely forgot that other people don’t know them (the rules in the supervision), or they don’t think they’re worth mentioning” (Petre & Rugg, 2010, p.xi). Hence, it was quite possible that without input from the supervisors, the students might not fully understand the implications of the information such as the understood rules in the supervision.

It was unclear whether the Chinese students knew the rules, and that their expectations were supposed to be discussed at the beginning of the postgraduate supervision at the Western universities, because seven students did not talk about the ground rules and expectations with their supervisors, and six of them were doing their postgraduate studies for the first time at a Western university. Even though they might receive the information about what to expect from the university, it is unlikely that they would really read through the whole booklet. While five supervisors did not talk about the ground rules and expectations with their Chinese students, some supervisors might argue that if the students had already been provided information about the supervision, they should read it through in their own time. Supervisors did not want to waste time talking about these things again, or maybe they assumed their students knew what to expect because the students had been in their classes.

Furthermore, it was clear in the student interviews that most of the students brought their own expectations into the supervision but these expectations were unvoiced. As Zhou (2010) and Cadman (2000) found, Chinese students are often extremely reluctant to talk about their expectations and needs; they would rather be silent because they fear they will compromise their standing academically or in their departments. In the student interviews, Chinese students tended to ‘hope’ their supervisors knew what their

expectations and needs were. When their supervisor did not meet their expectations or hopes, there was a feeling of resentment in their voice, such as “he should feel guilty” for not giving the student enough time, and “I hoped he could give me more advice” but he did not. The problem with the students was that they assumed their supervisors knew their needs, but the fact was that their supervisors would not know what their students thought if they did not speak out. This was also an intercultural communication issue, which will be discussed later. Thus, both students and supervisors were often unaware of each other’s expectations and assumptions.

To some extent, how Chinese students and supervisors perceive their supervisory relationship is also based on their expectations and assumptions. As the results showed in the surveys and interviews, both Chinese students and supervisors said they had good relationships. However, their understanding of what is a good relationship actually is very different. From a Chinese student’s point of view, a good supervisory relationship is to have a supervisor who “understand(s) their research supervisory needs” as well as their “idiosyncratic needs” (Kam, 1997, p.82); they expect “a hierarchic distance but a professional closeness” with their supervisors (Edwards & Ran, 2006, p.6). In contrast, a good relationship from a supervisor’s point of view is “a type of personal collegiality, but professional independence and initiative” (Edwards & Ran, 2006, p.6). Lee (2008) maintains that a good relationship does not necessarily mean there is friendship right from the start; in fact, she suggests that if they get too friendly this can make the supervisory relationship less successful because it might prevent critical thinking; “The power dynamic between supervisor and student makes friendship difficult” (p.275). Both student and supervisor interviews demonstrated how they perceive a good relationship. In student interviews, all students viewed their supervisors as their “Teacher” which implied the hierarchical relationship they had with their supervisors in

China; they expected to get all the academic support from their supervisors but they would not take the initiative to ask for their support; they hoped to get emotional support but they would not talk about their personal issues until they were invited. In the supervisor interviews, supervisors only wanted to have a professional relationship or an academic relationship with their students; they did not want to be involved with students' personal lives or share their own personal lives with their students. While a good relationship is quite different from the students and supervisors' perspectives, lack of awareness of cultural differences again appeared to be the issue between the cohorts.

At certain points, students might have assumed their supervisors knew more about the supervision because they were the ones who had the knowledge and the experience. However, the students probably ignored the fact that some supervisors might not have the knowledge in students' research areas and they might be supervising a Chinese student for the first time. For example, Supervisor 6 was not familiar with the area of one of her Chinese students' research, but she still agreed to supervise the student because the student's primary supervisor was her friend. Again, it was Supervisor 3's first time supervising a Chinese student. She said she had not noticed any cultural differences between her and her Chinese student, so she might not know any issues which might have already appeared in her supervision. The supervisors might forget that every student is different and thus they treated every supervision the same. Hence, it was possible that supervisors in Western universities did not understand the importance of asking the students what they expected from them, and students found it difficult to ask questions as well. This matter is related to cultural differences so it will be discussed further in the corresponding section.

5.2.2 Power distance

The issue of power distance between the Chinese students and supervisors is apparent in this study. As already mentioned in the literature review, Chinese students are likely to bring the Chinese learning style, which is to completely follow the supervisor's instructions and thoughts of the hierarchical relationship (see Chapter 2.1.3) to the Western supervisory relationship (Campbell & Li, 2008; Krase, 2007; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Zhang & Brunton, 2007; Zhang & Zhou, 2011; Zhou, 2011). In student interviews, all Chinese students seemed to bring their Chinese mindset into the New Zealand supervision: four of them mentioned the power distance between themselves and their supervisors; seven revealed that they had to be careful about disagreeing with their supervisors; and two were scared to question their supervisors. Cadman (2000) also affirmed that Chinese students would not discuss anything until they were invited by their supervisors. Although many students have been studying at New Zealand universities for over 3 years and are familiar with New Zealand culture, I felt there was still a sense of fear in them. While I was interviewing them, some were really reluctant to talk about issues in their supervisory relationship. Two students even asked me to stop recording when some serious issues were raised. I did not ask them what they were afraid of, but a sense of fear was seemed apparent while some of the students talked about the relationship during the interviews.

The fear in Chinese students may be because they have lived under decades of authoritarian repression. Chinese supervisors, in a high power distant culture, have great power in deciding whether students pass their theses or not, as they are the final authority in Chinese supervision (Zhou, 2010; Ladd & Ruby, 1999). Therefore, the majority of Chinese students are unlikely to disagree or critique their supervisors in their

supervision. In other words, if Chinese supervisors feel that their students are not sufficiently respectful, they could sabotage the students by not letting them pass their theses. This illustrates the power distance between the students and supervisors in China. In New Zealand supervision, although the Chinese students did not say they were afraid that they might not pass their theses if they upset their supervisors, the cautiousness and worries were quite clear in their words, implying that their supervisors could take their revenge on them.

On the supervisors' side, the power distance was not so apparent because New Zealand is a low power distant society where the educational process tends to be more student-centered, with the supervisor encouraging students to question and critique the ideas being put forward (Hofstede, 2001). Supervisors are most likely to treat their students as equals even though they keep their distance from their students. They respect their students' disagreement, and they also encourage their students to debate their ideas. However, the questions raised in this regard were: 1) Can Western supervisors really handle the disagreement and critiques? As shown in the results, two supervisors had a lot of issues with their Chinese students who did not agree with them in many aspects in the study, and they thought the way they had behaved was rude and disrespectful. 2) Was there a double standard for international students and English-speaking students? As one supervisor said "it's important for international students to understand that they need to do the thesis in my way". This supervisor had taught in China for many years, so if he enjoyed the greater status in China, it is understandable that he required his international students to do things his way. If it was the Kiwi students, as another supervisor pointed out, "they would just turn around say no, I don't want to do it that way, and this is way I want to do it, and this is why." This issue was also found in Manathunga's (2007) research.

Hence, the issues of power distance in Western supervision exist (Hemer, 2012; Manathunga, 2007; Manathunga, 2012), but compared with China, most research indicated that although it is not apparent, there was still quite a strong hierarchy in New Zealand. That is why eight students preferred the Western ways of supervision. They were happy being supervised as equals, and they liked to be treated respectfully when they treated their supervisors respectfully.

5.2.3 Vulnerability

The vulnerability was not only shown in the student interviews, but also in the supervisor interviews. In the student interviews, Chinese students faced both academic challenges and personal challenges, such as the language difficulties, cultural differences, different education systems, different learning styles, isolation, loneliness, and homesickness. These challenges were also found in a number of previous studies (Campbell & Li, 2008; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Zhang & Brunton, 2007; Zhang & Zhou, 2011; Zhou, 2011). Some students had to worry about their visas and whether they could finish their theses on time; some had to worry about financial difficulties if they ran out of money; some had to worry about whether they could pass the examination of their theses; and some had to worry about finding a job after finishing their theses. At the same time, all of them had to worry about inadequate command of the language, a lack of cultural understanding, or a lack of communication skills in their studies. These challenges, as Olivas & Li (2006) and Yakunina et al. (2013) point out, put international students in a very vulnerable position.

For example, Student 4 was stressed because he could not get a straight answer from his supervisors. He said:

On another day, I asked my supervisors about my progression, but they didn't give me a clear answer whether I'm doing good or bad, they just said "if you don't get bad news, it's good news", and I found that was really vague. It's quite tiring sometimes if you can't get straight answers, you know.

There was a reason why he needed assurance from his supervisors. One of his friends was told by the supervisor that he was good and he was on the right track. However, in the end, his friend did not pass the PhD examination due to the poor quality of the thesis. So this student interviewee was very worried that he might end up like his friend without a qualification after three years of hard work.

Student 6 was extremely depressed because of the loneliness. He said:

How much pressure is in the PhD study, no one knows but you. So sometimes while I was listening to Chinese music, tears would come flowing down my cheeks and I would miss home terribly at that moment. Especially in summer holidays, everyone has gone home, I would miss home terribly, terribly. Because I want to keep writing so I can finish it sooner, so I can't go home during the holidays. I am staying here and repeat the same thing every day, get up to eat, and then go to school and write my thesis, and then go back where I live, take a shower and go to sleep. It makes me feel like I live in the jail, a bigger jail. I am under tremendous stress.

Unlike the newly arrived Chinese students who might have academic culture shock or language shock, this student who had tremendous stress had been studying in New Zealand for 11 years. He said in the interviews that he did not have other issues apart from some language issues in his supervision, so one would assume that he would have less vulnerability than those international students who had only been New Zealand for a

short period of time. It was surprising that he was so vulnerable in his PhD study but he could not see that as an issue in his supervision.

Even though there was no evidence of vulnerability shown in supervisor interviews, in a sense, they were also vulnerable in many situations in the supervision. As many students mentioned in the interviews, their supervisors were very busy so they did not get sufficient time with their supervisors, or their supervisors had no time or forgot to return their emails. Many supervisors in Western universities have a heavy work load: they not only supervise research students, they also teach undergraduate and master's papers, do PhD study, do their own research, have a lot of meetings, attend research seminars, and so on. Moreover, if they are supervising several postgraduate students at the same time, and the students want to have a close relationship and require a lot of support, it is impossible for them to meet the students' needs and therefore this may lead to poor completion (Lee, 2008; Wisker et al., 2007). Thus, supervisors are more vulnerable than students because they not only need to meet students' needs in order for them to complete their research, but also they have to meet their own needs as well as the universities' needs, in order to pursue their own career interests (Lee, 2008).

5.3 Language issues

The language issues were not only identified by the Chinese students, but also by the supervisors who indicated in both surveys and interviews that their students had language issues. Although all Chinese students had met the entrance requirements of postgraduate study and some had already lived in New Zealand longer than 5 years, difficulties with English are the major challenge for Chinese students (Campbell & Li, 2008; Chang & Strauss, 2010; Edwards & Ran, 2006; Gu, 2011; Strauss, Walton, & Madsen, 2003; Yang, 2011).

5.3.1 Spoken English

While the surveys showed that some Chinese students believed having an English-speaking supervisor would help them improve their English, the reality shown in the interviews was that Chinese students often found themselves having no chance to practice speaking, as most of the time they were writing and reading. For those students who did not see their supervisors often, the computer probably was the only way they communicated during their study. These feelings were shared with other Chinese students in a number of previous studies (Cadman, 2000; Campbell & Li, 2008; Edwards & Ran, 2006; Strauss, 2012).

Some students in the interviews did not think they had language issues because they understood what their supervisors said when they discussed their project. However, understanding what was said to them did not mean they were able to respond adequately at once. In other words, if students could not communicate their thoughts and concerns in a way that their supervisors could understand, then that is a language issue (Huang & Rinaldo, 2009). With regard to speaking, Chinese students not only needed to think about the language before they spoke, they also needed to know how to say what they wanted to say so that the language did not come across as offensive, impolite, or threatening. Some students might need to process their ideas in Chinese, and then translate them into English in order to respond. These language issues were also shared with Student 2, 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10 in the interviews. In addition, an indication of language processing during conversation was silence, which might be one of the reasons why Chinese students were stereotyped as being quiet or lacking critical thinking. Thus, the language issues appeared to be more problematic than students realise.

Furthermore, the language could cause distance between the students and their supervisors. As shown in the interview data, Student 8 said her supervisor would chat and joke with the American student but not her. And Student 3 said:

When we meet in the office, they two (students' supervisors) first talk about what is happening in the world, I think this kind of discussion often happens between friends. In this situation, I felt I couldn't say anything, I can only understand what they talk about. They do make some jokes sometimes, but I don't usually respond to their jokes, I just sit there and listen, I might smile at them...they speak so fast when they don't talk to me. Their voices tend to be lower, I don't really understand what they say, I can only understand some of them. There is no time for me to think and react to their topic, jokes, but I do know when to laugh. But I'm unlikely to have conversation with them like I talk to my friends.

Some students in the interviews also pointed out that being able to have discussion with supervisors without any language barriers, they not only needed to speak fluently in academic English and colloquial English, they also needed to understand the slang, idioms, and jokes. These views are also found in Huang & Rinaldo (2009). It is possible that being able to speak English fluently might improve the relationship with their supervisors, but it does not always seem to be the case.

5.3.2 Written English

Written English is one of the biggest challenges for Chinese students in both surveys and interviews. In student interviews, all students confessed to having issues in written English. Some students talked about grammatical errors in their writing such as articles, pronouns and tense, and some students said that they had difficulties producing a logical written text. These language issues in written work are quite common among ESL postgraduate students; they have already been identified by many studies (Cadman, 2000;

Campbell & Li, 2008; Edwards & Ran, 2006; Strauss, 2012; Strauss & Walton, 2005; Strauss, Walton, & Madsen, 2003).

However, the prominent problem in this study was the sense of confusion as to how English language should be presented in written work. Student 4, for example, mentioned the use of words. He was doing his PhD in discourse analysis with two supervisors (one is South African and the other a New Zealander). He usually used 'instead of' in his writing, but his supervisors suggested he use 'rather than', and then he asked them why using 'rather than' is better. His two supervisors did not know why, and they just thought it sounded better. Student 10 was also confused about the use of language. He was studying psychology at a New Zealand university, and had been in New Zealand for nine years. After he got his thesis proofread from a proofreader who was working at the Student Learning Centre of the university, he showed the proofread thesis to his supervisor, but the supervisor still thought the language was not quite right. The student's supervisor was from South Africa and the proofreader was a New Zealander, and the student thought that the reason why the language was not quite right to his supervisor might be because South African English is different from New Zealand English. Strauss (2012) also found that one of the postgraduate students in her research thought that "the English is not the same" (p.6). At a certain point, ESL students would be confused about which English is the right English, American English, British English, Australian English, New Zealand English, or the English imposed by the institutions.

The Western institution maybe "has the right to impose English language standards" in order for them to maintain the standards of the institution (Strauss, 2012, p.7). However, Widdowson (1994) notes:

“The very idea of a standard implies stability, and this can only be fixed in reference to the past. But language is of its nature unstable. It is essential protean in nature, adapting its shape to suit changing circumstances. It would otherwise lose its vitality and its communicative and communal value.” (as cited in Strauss, 2012, p.7)

Indeed, there are many ways to write acceptably for the academy. For example, in Eley and Jennings’s (2005) book, their research is presented as if they are telling stories, and their language is quite informal. In Petre and Rugg’s (2010) book, they have used a lot of colloquial English and contractions, such as “it’s not all take – you have to give too” (p.47). Moreover, a number of journal articles and text books and theses have used first person in their texts. The contradiction begins in the fact that a number of rules in academic writing require students to avoid using first person (Strauss, 2012), avoid using colloquial English and slang, avoid using place adverbs within the verb, and avoid using contractions (Swales & Feak, 2004). On the other hand, these avoidances are often used in the academic writing by a number of academic writers. As Close (1971) points out:

“Teachers and textbook writers often invent rules which their students and readers repeat and perpetuate. These rules are usually statements about English usage which the authors imagine to be, as a rule, true. But statements of this kind are extremely difficult to formulate both simply and accurately. They are rarely altogether true; often only partially true; sometimes contradicted by usage itself. Sometimes the contrary to them is also true.” (pp. 10-11)

Obviously, academic English needs to have rules as it should be clear and concise, analyse rather than describe, support ideas with academically respected sources. It has stricter conventions than normal written English and makes extensive use of citations (Swales & Feak, 2004). Considering English has become a global language, it would be

good to see some more recognition that academics could be more flexible in what they accept.

In the supervisor interviews, some supervisors were only concerned about grammatical errors in their students' written work, and some were concerned about the issue of their student producing a logical and clear thesis. However, the difficulty in thesis writing was not only a challenge for the Chinese students, but it is also an issue for the native English-speaking students (Strauss, Walton and Madsen, 2003). As Supervisor 8 pointed out:

The one from Malaysia has what I call word blindness, she cannot write. And I might say that I've also had Kiwi students who are also word blind, they are intelligent, but they somehow lack the ability to construct the discourse. And also in this particular case, she is also unable to spot her own agreement errors for example.

It is important to note that the language issue may have “potential to complicate and even jeopardise the supervisory relationship” (Strauss, Walton & Madsen, 2003, p.5). Therefore, both Chinese students and English-speaking supervisors should be aware of the use of language in the thesis.

5.4 Cultural difference issues

As language is a part of a country's cultural characteristics, the issues of language and cultural differences are often identified together (Cadman, 2000; Campbell & Li, 2008; Edwards & Ran, 2006; Strauss, 2012; Strauss & Walton, 2005; Strauss, Walton and Madsen, 2003). In the surveys, a total of 90% of the Chinese students and 75% of the supervisors found that the language and cultural differences were the biggest challenges in their supervision. In the interviews, 90% of the Chinese students and 70% of the

supervisors identified the cultural differences in their supervision, but most of them did not think that the cultural differences had had much impact on their relationships.

However, the cultural differences between students and supervisors appeared to be quite obvious in the interviews. For example, Student 3 felt uncomfortable calling her supervisors by their first names; this was also shown in Ingleby & Chung's (2009) findings. In China, students call their teachers, lecturers, and supervisors by "family name + teacher" such as "Zhang teacher" (张老师 'Zhang Laoshi'). Chinese Students are unlikely to call their teachers by their first name as they do not want to be considered impolite and disrespectful. Another example of cultural difference in the student interviews was when Student 4 tried to be modest but one of his supervisors did not know that. These two examples are quite representative of cultural differences between the Chinese students and English-speaking supervisors. Hence, when both Chinese student and supervisor are unaware of the cultural differences, they might have intercultural communication issues. This will be discussed later.

5.4.1 Face in Chinese students

As indicated earlier, 'Face', as a part of Chinese identity, is a highly regarded issue in Chinese culture; this has been reported by a number of researchers (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; Brown, 2010; Chen, Chen, & Chang, 2011; Guan & Park, 2009; Hahn & Hatfield, 2011; Highfield, 2009; Oetzel et al., 2001; Sifianou, 2012; Vinagre, 2008). Surprisingly in this present study, face was found not to be the main issue among Chinese students. Six students said that they had not had any issues of losing face during their supervision. Four students said that they only had face issues at the beginning of their supervision, and once they and their supervisors got to know each other, they were less likely to feel they were losing face. I need to point out that seven out of ten student interviewees had

been in New Zealand for over three years (see Table 3), and also they preferred the Western style of supervision, which means they were most likely to adapt to Western culture quite quickly. Surprisingly though Student 9, for example, who had only been in New Zealand for a month when she was interviewed said she was really happy with her two supervisors, and they often praised and encouraged her, gave her a lot of support (academic and emotional), so she did not feel that she was exposed to any situation where she might lose face.

However, the implications of the face issue were the ones who had lost face would deny the face issues rather than admitting they had lost face. For example, Student 6 denied that he had a face issue; however, when I asked him whether he had a language issue, at first he said no, but then later he said English names were very hard for him to pronounce and remember. When I asked him whether there were cultural differences between him and his supervisor, he said “I don’t have issues”, but he kept comparing his supervisor with his Chinese supervisor and explaining the differences, and he kept talking about the differences between white people in New Zealand and Asians. When I asked him whether he had intercultural communication issues, at first he said no, but then he said, “I have to be very careful, I need to consider my supervisor’s feeling and save his face”. When I asked him whether he had been trying to save face, he replied “if you still want to save face, you can’t do your PhD”. It appeared that he quite often contradicted himself in the interview, but I was not sure whether he was trying to save his face by saying he had no face issues or he just did not realise he had face issues. Quite often, as Ingleby & Chung (2009) suggested, Chinese students would endeavour to maintain their good face by denying their face issues.

5.4.2 Cultural Stereotypes

As previous studies stated, Chinese students are often seen as quiet, passive and lacking in critical thinking (Cadman, 2000; Campbell & Li, 2008; Chuah, 2010; Huang, 2005). Some studies also suggested that the Confucian philosophy of learning caused the cultural stereotypes of Chinese students (Cadman, 2000; Campbell & Li, 2008; Chang & Strauss, 2010). However, the results in the student interviews did not support the claims that have been made. Some Chinese students did not think that a lack of critical thinking ability, a lack of language proficiency or a lack of knowledge in their study areas were the main reasons preventing them from being critical about the topics; this was also established by Campbell and Li (2008), Chuah (2010) and Cadman (2000). Another characteristic raised was being quiet, this was connected to personality. As Student 5 explained, he did not like talking. Even when he was with his Chinese friends, he would not talk much. Besides, some students would prefer email discussion and online discussion as it allowed them to think before replying; this was also found in Chen and Bennett (2012) and Holmes (2006). Therefore, the Confucian philosophy of learning was not the main reason for Chinese students being quiet, passive, or lacking in critical thinking. In fact, all students said how they behaved had nothing to do with Confucianism, and some honestly admitted that they had no idea what Confucian philosophy was.

It is undeniable that Confucian philosophy has some influence in Chinese society. However, people born in the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s, were not educated with the ideas of Confucius. Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought (马克思列宁主义和毛泽东思想) were the compulsory lessons taught from primary school to university (Chen & Wu, 2011; Wang, 2011; Zhou, 2010). Chinese people were mainly influenced by the

ideas of communism, ethnocentrism, and Maoism in the period of the Cultural Revolution. After Deng Xiaoping proposed the “Reforms and Opening-up” (改革开放), people restarted their interest in studying and promoting the philosophy of Confucius, Mencius, Laozi in China. Although the Party is willing to open to the world today, the nature of intolerance in “those who question its right to rule” is still strong (Lawrence & Martin, 2013, p.1). The fear is somewhat deep-rooted in people. They are reluctant to criticise and to voice their point of view as they fear retaliation. Besides, the term of critical thinking is a secularist intellectual tradition from Western academies (Stevenson and Brand, 2006). Thus, supervisors need to be aware of this cultural difference between them and their Chinese students.

5.5 Intercultural communication issues

The findings of both the surveys and interviews showed that students were often reluctant to tell their supervisors if they had problems in their supervision. This might be caused by many reasons, such as the power distance between the students and supervisors (Cadman, 2000; Krase, 2007; Zhou, 2010). It was quite clear in the interviews that the students lacked understanding of the importance of communication in the supervisory relationship. As a result of their expectations, students actually wanted their supervisor to give them more support, but they did not tell the supervisors, so the supervisors would not know how to help their students. So the problem in this issue was that Chinese students might not realise the importance of communication in the supervisory relationship or they probably did not know how to handle communication between them and their supervisors.

5.5.1 Face threatening

In the student interviews, even though the supervisors were busy or seemed to show a lack of responsibility, many students were less likely to make any complaint. When students disagreed with their supervisors, they had to be very careful. When students discussed issues with their supervisors they were more likely to use polite or indirect ways to express their thoughts. These issues are also found in Ingleby & Chung (2009), who suggested that Chinese students need to communicate with their supervisors if they have issues in the supervisory relationship, because the issues will not disappear.

Moreover, if the issues are ignored, there is a great risk of them snowballing.

Critique is another issue of intercultural communication which can also be easily seen as a Face Threatening Act (FTA). It is likely to be perceived differently in Chinese culture and Western culture. In Western culture, critique or disagreement is seen as “the expression of a view that differs from that expressed by another speaker” (Sifianou, 2012, p.1554), whereas in China, as many student interviewees have already mentioned, it can easily make someone lose face. Supervisors might think that they only critique the idea, but the critique might be received as disapproval or unworthiness by the Chinese students. So it is most likely that two people who are from two very different cultural backgrounds would rely on the norms of their mother tongue and native culture to interpret meaning (Kaur, 2011).

In the supervisor interviews, none of the supervisors knew that the word ‘want’ in Chinese was actually a polite way to ask for something compared to the way the word was considered in the West as being a little demanding and impolite. This was also found in Chen et al. (2011). Therefore, recognising the intercultural differences will not only help both Chinese students and supervisors have a better understanding of

communication in the supervisory relationship, but will also lead both cohorts to a successful completion of the theses.

5.6 Reflections of researcher's supervision

Since I am a Chinese postgraduate student who is supervised by two English speaking supervisors at a New Zealand university, it is sensible to reflect on what I have experienced and what my perceptions are in my supervision. My reflection will also be based on the supervisory relationship, language issues, cultural differences, and intercultural communication. So if there is any biased interpretation in the discussion, it will be understandable why I have interpreted things in that way.

5.6.1 Positive aspects

Like some of the Chinese students, I chose my own supervisors, ones whom I felt comfortable working with. After expressing my interest in supervisor A and supervisor B, I was assigned to both of them as co-supervisors in my supervision. Although I had heard some unpleasant experiences about the supervisory relationship from other postgraduate students, because I was taught by both of my supervisors and I liked their teaching style, I agreed with some student interviewees that it is good to know your supervisors before entering the supervision. Both of my supervisors and I have maintained a very good supervisor/student relationship. Although we did not talk about the expectations at the beginning of the supervision, they did print out the ground rules for me to look at so I would have some understanding about what the boundaries are and what to expect. Besides, my research topic is about the supervisory relationship, so it is inevitable for them to include their expectations in the discussions during our meetings.

From the beginning of the supervision, they have been very patient with me and provided a lot of support, sometimes the extra support was more than I expected. For example, we met almost once a week to discuss whatever was related to the research. For example, they made suggestions narrowing down the research topic so that my project was more specific in certain problematic areas of target groups; they assisted me to prepare my research proposal so that the proposal was approved without too many obstacles; they gave ideas about what the survey and interview questionnaires should be like so that I could use them to answer my research questions, and so on. I did not expect I would get this help before entering the supervision, as from what I heard, I thought I would be on my own. Surprisingly, I was not only getting all the academic support from them, but also getting other support such as they would write a reference for me so I could apply for a scholarship, or they would ask me something like 'is there anything we can help with?' Apart from that, I enjoyed having a little chat with them now and then. Sometimes they would make jokes about themselves, and sometimes they would tease me when we had a casual chat. Everything they did in the supervision made me trust and respect them. Without their encouragement, support and patience, I might have quit my study. Therefore, supervisors' support, both academically and emotionally, is very important.

My supervisors and I rarely have intercultural communication issues. On the one hand, I am very aware of the problems in intercultural communication since it is one of the topics in this research, so I am always willing to open my mind to listen to their point of view. On the other hand, both of my supervisors are aware of cross-cultural issues, as it is part of their research areas, so there was unlikely to be communication issues between us. Unlike the Chinese students whom I interviewed, language, culture and communication were not the main issues in my supervisory relationship.

5.6.2 Negative aspects

Like other Chinese students, I have experienced many challenges in my supervision as well. The biggest challenge for me was to disagree with my supervisors either face to face or in writing. For example, supervisor B sometimes would make comments such as “we don’t say that in English”, or “do not end with quotes”. In this case, I would not agree with what she suggested but I did not want to argue with her either. This was because I have my own thoughts about the language and how the language is used in academic writing since I have been studying the English language for over eight years as well as reading hundreds of journal articles, books and theses about the English language during my studies in New Zealand. I thought it was good for her to point these things out as she made me think more about the language, so I could decide whether I should take her advice or just stick to my way of writing in English. On the other hand, I would sometimes take their advice even if I did not agree with their opinions. This is another reason why I do not usually argue with them: the power distance was still in my mind, and it would make me feel I am being disrespectful and impolite when I disagree with my supervisors. However, if there was a point that I needed to make, I would certainly let them know.

Language is one of the challenges which is most likely to be faced by many students who speak English as their second language, and that happened to me too. For example, in speaking, I often forgot the words I wanted to say, or I mispronounced the words I was saying, or some vocabulary my supervisors said I did not know. Luckily, I was able to use other words to substitute the words I wanted to say, if I did not say it clearly. My two supervisors understood the meaning I was trying to convey, or if I did not know the

words they told me I could guess the meaning from the context. In writing, I also have a grammar issue, which is the same as other Chinese students in this study.

Language is a part of the culture, so the cultural differences between us are apparent. For example, when we discussed Chinese cultural education background, I would see how different Chinese traditional thinking is from a Western point of view. For example, supervisor A suggested that Confucianism is one of the important aspects I should discuss in my thesis, because it reflects why Chinese students behave the way they do. I would argue that Confucianism is more likely to be seen as the platform to promote Chinese language teaching, spreading Chinese culture and literature of global brands from a Chinese point of view. The findings in this regard have also shown that Confucian ideology is not the main determiner of how Chinese students behave in academic study.

Like most Chinese students, I had a lot of stress during my second stage of the study. This stress had been gradually building up starting from transcribing the interview data. It not only made me feel sick physically and mentally, but it also affected my study performance very much, and many times I wanted to quit. I did not want to tell my supervisors as I did not want them to think that I was weak and I could not handle the stress, because every postgraduate student has been or is going through the same thing. In fact, I was trying to save my face and to keep my pride rather than telling them I felt lonely, stressed, and vulnerable. Indeed, supervisors are supervisors, they are not psychologists. It is not their role or responsibility to help students overcome their anxiety. These are my personal issues, not theirs, so I have to overcome them by myself. At the time of writing this, I am still on a roller coaster, but I do not want to quit because I am almost there. I feel obliged to finish the project. I cannot let my supervisors down

since they have helped me so much. More importantly, I cannot let myself down since I have worked so hard for this project. In a way, having supportive and encouraging supervisors helps students to overcome life's difficulties.

Examining the relationship between the Chinese students and supervisors at New Zealand universities made me even more certain that language, culture and communication are very crucial aspects in cross-cultural supervision. Each one of us is different. We have different personalities, different life and learning experiences, different cultural backgrounds, and different ways of communicating with each other. Both students and supervisors are required to be aware of these aspects during the supervisory process.

5.7 Conclusion

This study has given the perceptions and experiences of both Chinese students and supervisors in New Zealand universities, and the complexities of the supervisory relationship, cultural differences and intercultural communication were also discussed. The major contribution of this research is that unlike the stereotypical Chinese student, the Chinese students in this study were not quiet or lacking in critical thinking. They were actually independent and used their own ways to debate with their supervisors.

In the narrower sense, the findings demonstrate that mutual understanding in the supervisory relationship could promote effective learning for both Chinese students and supervisors. In the broader sense, the findings determine that language, culture and communication are not only very important for students who do not speak English as their first language in English speaking universities, but also important for those who are native English speaking educators. Without knowing the importance of these areas, both ESL students and Western educators will encounter more challenges in higher education.

This research journey has not only increased my understanding of the challenges and issues faced by both parties in the supervision relationship, but also highlighted the key issues and realities from the perspectives of both the Chinese postgraduate students and New Zealand supervisors.

“Indeed, the successful completion of a high quality graduate thesis enhances the reputation of students, supervisor and department, and provided a labour pool from which new academic staff are recruited. Furthermore, the quality of any academic community is influenced by the kinds of educational processes that students engage in and, as the initiation into the advanced skills of the academy, supervision is crucial.”
(Grant & Graham, 1999, p.78)

5.8 Limitations

There are several limitations in this study. Firstly as a novice researcher, I lacked the interview skills while I was doing the interviews with both students and supervisor. I did not keep asking questions where problems were indicated. Some questions could have identified the issues but were not asked, such as in the student interview. For example, why did they not discuss their expectations with supervisors if they expected something from their supervisors? In the supervisor interview, have they ever thought of asking their students what they expected in a supervisory relationship? So when the data was analysed and discussed, this limitation became very obvious.

Secondly, in this study only 51 (28 Chinese students and 23 supervisors) participants completed the survey and 20 (10 Chinese students and 10 supervisors) were interviewed. Due to this small sample size the perceptions and experiences cannot be generalised to other groups in New Zealand as the findings might be unique to the relatively few people included in the research study.

Thirdly, the design of the survey was also a limitation of this study. The initial thoughts of the design was to match both students and supervisors' questionnaires. However, the final design in the supervisors' questionnaire was missing three questions, and some of the questions also did not match the students' questions. Thus, the survey findings may be affected by the design.

There might be some critical comments about students or supervisors in the discussion, which may have been influenced by my personal bias and idiosyncrasies.

5.9 Recommendations

This study has contributed to our understanding of the supervisory relationship as many Chinese students continue coming to New Zealand to get higher education. It is important for them to have better understandings of intercultural differences. This study could be duplicated to investigate the same cultural groups on a larger scale and explore areas that were not covered in the study.

Future research could also examine the different ethnicities such as Korean students' or Indian students' perceptions and experiences of their postgraduate relationship in New Zealand. These three ethnic groups have the largest numbers of international students in New Zealand which means they are also significant contributors to New Zealand's economy (Ministry of Education, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2012). It would be interesting to compare the findings of this study with other studies in future so that New Zealand educators are more aware of the similarities and differences among international students, and international students would have a better understanding of New Zealand academic culture. All of this should lead to more successful thesis completion, which is the aim of international students studying in New Zealand.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Chinese Student Information sheet

Participant Information Sheet



For Chinese postgraduate students

Date Information Sheet Produced:

15 August, 2012

Project Title

Examining the perception of the supervisory relationship between Chinese-speaking postgraduate students and English-speaking supervisors at New Zealand universities

An Invitation

My name is Anna Edmonds and I would like to invite you to take part in a research project.

In this project, I am interested in examining the perception of the supervisory relationship between Chinese-speaking postgraduate students and English-speaking supervisors. There are two main reasons for this study: 1) this research is part of the requirements for my Master of Applied Language Studies at AUT University. 2) In New Zealand a large cohort of international students comes from China, and you and your English-speaking supervisors are drawn from widely differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It is clear from the literature that Chinese students do experience difficulties in their supervisory relationship. I would like to investigate your perception of your supervisory relationship paying particular attention to the way you and your supervisor communicate with each other.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. While I would be pleased to have you participate I respect your right to withdraw from the study at any time prior to the completion of data collection. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the purpose of this research?

The primary purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of the challenges and issues faced by both you and your English-speaking supervisors in the supervisory relationship, to highlight the key issues from your and New Zealand supervisors' perspectives.

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

You have been identified because you completed the online survey web-link and indicated your willingness to be interviewed.

What will happen in this research?

During this approximately 45 minute interview, you will be asked questions based on your answers to the questionnaire. I will also invite you to share some of your perceptions about your experiences in

supervision at your host institution.

If for any reason you feel any discomfort during the interview, you can either choose not to answer a question or choose to withdraw from the interview immediately. And as a participant in this project, you can access AUT counselling's online services when necessary, even if you are not a student of AUT.

What are the benefits?

Benefit for you: as this study will highlight some key issues and perceptions in supervision, it is hoped you can gain information related to intercultural communication to avoid some of the conflicts or misunderstandings in future.

Benefit for the researcher: I would gain knowledge in the area of this study as well as contributing to some new areas in relation to the supervisory relationship.

How will my privacy be protected?

Please note that all attempts will be made to protect your confidentiality. You will not be identified as I will only use codes, such as student 1, student 2, supervisor 1 and supervisor 2.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is no cost to you for participating in this project apart from the 45 minutes you spend in the interview.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Simply fill out the consent form and return it to me.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, if you are interested in receiving a summary of the findings, please let me know.

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

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor,

Assoc Prof Pat Strauss (921-9999, Ext 6847) Email: pat.strauss@aut.ac.nz

Dr Lynn Grant (921-9999, Ext 6826) Email: lynn.grant@aut.ac.nz

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEK, Dr Rosemary Godbold, rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 Ext 6902.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Anna Edmonds Email: annedm08@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

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

Dr Lynn Grant, School of Language and Culture, AUT University, Private Bag 92006, Auckland

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on **23 August 2012**,

AUTEK Reference number **12/191**.

Appendix B: Supervisor Information sheet

Participant Information Sheet



For English-speaking supervisors

Date Information Sheet Produced:

15 August, 2012

Project Title

Examining the perception of the supervisory relationship between Chinese-speaking postgraduate students and English-speaking supervisors at New Zealand universities

An Invitation

My name is Anna Edmonds and I would like to invite you to take part in a research project.

In this project, I am interested in examining the perception of the supervisory relationship between Chinese-speaking postgraduate students and English-speaking supervisors. There are two main reasons for this study: 1) this research is part of the requirements for my Master of Applied Language Studies at AUT University. 2) In New Zealand a large cohort of international students comes from China, and you and your Chinese-speaking postgraduate students are drawn from widely differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It is clear from the literature that Chinese students do experience difficulties in their supervisory relationship. I would like to investigate your perception of your supervisory relationship paying particular attention to the way you and your student communicate with each other.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. While I would be pleased to have you participate I respect your right to withdraw from the study at any time prior to the completion of data collection. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the purpose of this research?

The primary purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of the challenges and issues faced by both you and your Chinese-speaking postgraduate students in the supervisory relationship, to highlight the key issues from you and your Chinese-speaking postgraduate students' perspectives.

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

You have been identified because you completed the online survey web-link and indicated your willingness to be interviewed.

What will happen in this research?

During this approximately 45 minute interview, you will be asked questions based on your answers to the questionnaire. I will also invite you to share some of your perceptions about your experiences in supervising Chinese students at your host institution.

If for any reason you feel any discomfort during the interview, you can either choose not to answer a question or choose to withdraw from the interview.

What are the benefits?

Benefit for you: as this study will highlight some key issues and perceptions in supervision, it is hoped you can gain information related to intercultural communication to avoid some of the conflicts or misunderstandings in future.

Benefit for the researcher: I would gain knowledge in the area of this study as well as contribute to some new areas in relation to the supervisory relationship.

How will my privacy be protected?

Please note that all attempts will be made to protect your confidentiality. You will not be identified as I will only use codes, such as student 1, student 2, supervisor 1 and supervisor 2. Universities will not be identified.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is no cost to you for participating in this project apart from the 45 minutes you spend in the interview and the time it takes to check the transcript.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

I will email you to set up an appointment. At the same time I will email you a consent form which I will ask you to complete and give to me at the interview.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, if you are interested in receiving a summary of the findings, please let me know.

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 Supervisors,

Assoc Prof Pat Strauss (921-9999, Ext 6847) Email: pat.strauss@aut.ac.nz

Dr Lynn Grant (921-9999, Ext 6826) Email: lynn.grant@aut.ac.nz

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Dr Rosemary Godbold, rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6902.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Anna Edmonds, Email: annedm08@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

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

Dr Lynn Grant, School of Language and Culture, AUT University, Private Bag 92006, Auckland

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on **23 August 2012**,

AUTECH Reference number **12/191**.

Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent Form



Project title: Examining the perception of the supervisory relationship between Chinese-speaking postgraduate students and English-speaking supervisors at New Zealand universities

Project Supervisor: **Pat Strauss, Lynn Grant**

Researcher: **Anna Edmonds**

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 15 August, 2012.
- ☐ 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 ☐

Participant's signature:.....

Participant's name:.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 23 August 2012

AUTEC Reference number 12/191

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form

Appendix D: The email for Volunteer students

Hello postgraduate students,

Anna Edmonds is a postgraduate student at AUT University. She is conducting a research study to examine the perception of the supervisory relationship between Chinese-speaking postgraduate students and English-speaking supervisors. This research is also part of the requirements for her Master of Applied Language Studies degree.

The primary purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of the challenges and issues faced by both students and their English-speaking supervisors in the supervisory relationship, to highlight the key issues from student and New Zealand supervisors' perspectives.

She is looking for volunteers, who self-identify as a Chinese-speaking postgraduate students to do an online survey for this study. This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Taking part in this survey means that you are giving consent for her to use the data. All your answers will be anonymous.

The requirements are that you: 1) speak Chinese as your first-language; 2) are either full-time or part-time postgraduate students at a New Zealand university; 3) have an English first language (L1) supervisor.

If you are willing to take part on the survey please check on the link provided below.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/chinesespeakingpostgraduatestudents>

Appendix E: The email for Volunteer supervisors

Hello Postgraduate supervisors,

Anna Edmonds is a postgraduate student at AUT University, doing a Masters in Applied Language Studies. She is researching the supervisory relationship between Chinese-speaking postgraduate students and English-speaking supervisors.

The primary purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of the challenges and issues faced by both Chinese-speaking students and their English-speaking supervisors in the supervisory relationship, to highlight the key issues from both perspectives.

She is looking for volunteers, who self-identify as an English-speaking supervisor at our university, to do an online survey for this study. This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. All your answers will be anonymous.

For English-speaking supervisors, the requirements are that you: 1) speak English as your first-language; 2) are currently employed at a New Zealand university; 3) are either supervising a Chinese-speaking postgraduate student at a New Zealand university now or have in the past 3 years.

If you are willing to take part on the survey please check on the link provided below:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/enlgishspeaking supervisors>

Appendix F: Student Survey Questionnaire

Chinese-speaking postgraduate students' perceptions of supervisory relationship at NZ universities

母语是中文的研究生对新西兰大学导师关系的看法

Taking part in this survey indicates that you are giving consent to the research project.
参与这份问答表示你同意这项研究项目的调查。

If you are willing to be interviewed about your experiences of being supervised by an English-speaking supervisor please indicate this at the end of the questionnaire.

如果你愿意谈谈关于你对英语是母语的导师指导的感受和体验，请在这份调查问答卷末尾注明你愿意接受采访。

1. I am/was a Chinese-speaking postgraduate student at a New Zealand university.
我现在或曾经是一名在新西兰大学学习的研究生，我的母语是中文。

☐ Yes

☐ No

Other (please specify)

2. I have/had an English-speaking supervisor at a New Zealand university.
在我学习的新西兰大学里，我有或曾经有过一位英语是母语的导师。

☐ Yes

☐ No

Other (please specify)

3. My age range is:
我的年龄范围是：

☐ 20-29

☐ 30-39

☐ 40-49

☐ 50+

Other (please specify)

4. My gender is:

我的性别是:

☐ male

☐ female

Other (please specify)

5. I have lived in New Zealand for:

我已经在新西兰住了:

☐ less than 1 year

☐ 1-2 years

☐ 3-5 years

☐ 6-10 years

☐ 11+ years

Other (please specify)

6. My supervisor was:

我的导师是:

☐ chosen by me based on his/her reputation and knowledge in my area of study 基于他/她的声誉和在我的研究领域的知识我自己选择的

☐ recommended to me by other students/friends 其他学生或朋友推荐的

☐ assigned to me by the university (I had no choice) 我所在大学指定给我的 (我别无选择)

Please comment 如以上没有你可选的选项, 请注明这里:

7. The relationship I have with my supervisor is friendly:

我和我导师的关系是友好的:

☐ Completely disagree 完全不同意

☐ Mostly disagree 大多不同意

☐ Neither agree nor disagree 即不同意也不反对

☐ Mostly agree 大多同意

- ☐
- Completely agree 完全同意

Please comment 如以上没有你可选的选项，请注明这里:

[illegible]

8. I feel comfortable talking to my supervisor.

和导师谈话我感觉是轻松自在的。

- ☐ Completely disagree 完全不同意
- ☐ Mostly disagree 大多不同意
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree 即不同意也不反对
- ☐ Mostly agree 大多同意
- ☐ Completely agree 完全同意

Please comment 如以上没有你可选的选项, 请注明这里:

9. I regard my supervisor as my:

我把我的导师认作我的：

- colleague 同事
- teacher 老师
- parental figure/guardian 家长似的/监护人
- counselor 辅导员
- friend 朋友
- colleague and friend 同事和朋友

Please comment 如以上没有你可选的选项, 请注明这里:

10. My supervisor meets with me regularly.

我的导师定期地与我会面。

- ☐
- Completely disagree 完全不同意

- Neither agree nor disagree 即不同意也不反对

[illegible]

我的导师很容易交谈。

- 
- Mostly disagree 大多不同意

[illegible]

我的导师对我的电子邮件和/或电话留言会迅速回应。

- 
- Mostly disagree 大多不同意

[illegible]

13. My supervisor/s' advice on my study is helpful.

我导师的建议对我的研究很有帮助。

- ☐ Never 永远不会
- ☐ Seldom 很少
- ☐ Sometimes 有时
- ☐ Usually 通常
- ☐ Always 总是

Please comment 如以上没有你可选的选项，请注明这里：

14. I can ask my supervisor for advice on personal problems not related to my study.

我可以请教我的导师和研究无关的个人问题。

- ☐ Completely disagree 完全不同意
- ☐ Mostly disagree 大多不同意
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree 即不同意也不反对
- ☐ Mostly agree 大多同意
- ☐ Completely agree 完全同意

Please comment 如以上没有你可选的选项，请注明这里：

15. I feel concerned that I take up too much of supervisor's time.

我担心我占用太多导师的时间。

- ☐ Completely disagree 完全不同意
- ☐ Mostly disagree 大多不同意
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree 即不同意也不反对
- ☐ Mostly agree 大多同意
- ☐ Completely agree 完全同意

Please comment 如以上没有你可选的选项，请注明这里：

16. If I disagree with my supervisor, I am able to tell him/her so.

如果我和我的导师意见不一致，我能够告诉他/她。

- ☐ Completely disagree 完全不同意
- ☐ Mostly disagree 大多不同意
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree 即不同意也不反对
- ☐ Mostly agree 大多同意
- ☐ Completely agree 完全同意

Please comment 如以上没有你可选的选项，请注明这里：

17. I feel my supervisor respects me.

我觉得我的导师尊重我。

- ☐ Completely disagree 完全不同意
- ☐ Mostly disagree 大多不同意
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree 即不同意也不反对
- ☐ Mostly agree 大多同意
- ☐ Completely agree 完全同意

Please comment 如以上没有你可选的选项，请注明这里：

18. I feel my supervisor respects my culture.

我觉得我的导师尊重我的中国文化。

- ☐ Completely disagree 完全不同意
- ☐ Mostly disagree 大多不同意
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree 即不同意也不反对
- ☐ Mostly agree 大多同意

☐ Completely agree 完全同意

Please comment 如以上没有你可选的选项, 请注明这里:

19. I am comfortable telling my supervisor when I do not understand something he/she says.
当我听不懂我导师所说的话时，我可以轻松自在的告诉他/她。

☐ Completely disagree 完全不同意☐ Mostly disagree 大多不同意

Neither agree nor disagree 即不同意也不反对

☐ Mostly agree 大多同意☐ Completely agree 完全同意

Please comment 如以上没有你可选的选项, 请注明这里:

[illegible]

20. I think that our different cultural backgrounds make our relationship difficult.
我认为不同的文化背景会使我们不容易相处。

☐ Completely disagree 完全不同意 Mostly disagree 大多不同意

Neither agree nor disagree 即不同意也不反对

☐ Mostly agree 大多同意☐ Completely agree 完全同意

Please comment 如以上没有你可选的选项，请注明这里:

[illegible]

21. What are the advantages of being supervised by an English-speaking supervisor?
被英语是母语的导师指导的优势是什么？（可以用中文在下面的方框里描述）

[illegible]

22. What are the challenges of being supervised by an English-speaking supervisor?
被英语是母语的导师指导的挑战是什么？（可以用中文在下面的方框里描述）

23. Thank you very much for your time!
非常感谢您的参与！

If you would like to receive a copy of research finding by email, please leave your email in the
Comment box below:

如果您想通过电子邮件知道调查结果，请在下面的注释框中留下您的电子邮件：

24. Request for interview 采访的邀请

I am very keen to hear about your relationship with your English-speaking supervisors. If you
would like to share your experiences with me, I would be more than happy to meet you at a place
where is convenient for you. Please leave your name and contact information (email/phone) in the
Comment box below, I will contact you to arrange a time for me to interview you.

我非常希望知道您和您导师之间的关系。如果您想要和我分享您的感受和体验，我会很高兴
在你方便的时候采访你。您只要在下方的注释框中留下您的姓名和联系方式（电子邮件/电
话），我会和您取得联系安排我采访你的时间。

Appendix G: Supervisor Survey Questionnaire

English-speaking supervisors' perceptions of supervisory relationship at NZ universities

Taking part in this survey indicates that you are giving consent to the research project.

If you are willing to be interviewed about your experiences of supervising a Chinese student please indicate this at the end of the questionnaire.

1. I am a native English-speaking supervisor at a New Zealand university.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Other (please specify)

2. I am supervising /have supervised a Chinese-speaking postgraduate student at a New Zealand university.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Other (please specify)

3. My age range is:

☐ 30-39

☐ 40-49

☐ 50-59

☐ 60+

Other (please specify)

4. My gender is:

☐ male

☐ female

Other (please specify)

5. I have supervised Asian students before.

☐ Never

- ☐ 1-2
- ☐ 3-4
- ☐ 5 or more
- Other (please specify)

6. My Chinese student:

- ☐ approached me to supervise him/her
- ☐ was a mutual agreement
- ☐ was/were assigned to me by the university (I had no choice)

Please comment:

7. The relationship I have with my Chinese student is friendly:

- ☐ Completely disagree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Completely agree

Please comment:

8. I was/am comfortable talking to my Chinese student.

- ☐ Completely disagree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Completely agree

Please comment:

9. I regard my Chinese student as my:

- ☐ colleague
- ☐ student
- ☐ friend
- ☐ colleague and friend

Please comment:

10. I feel my Chinese student follows my advice.

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Seldom
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Usually
- ☐ Always

Please comment:

11. My Chinese student asks for advice on personal problems not related to his/her study.

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Seldom
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Usually
- ☐ Always

Please comment:

12. I feel concerned that my Chinese student takes up too much of my time.

- ☐ Completely disagree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Completely agree

Please comment:



13. If I disagree with my Chinese student, I find it easy to tell her/him of the problem.

- ☐ Completely disagree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Completely agree

Please comment:



14. I feel my Chinese student respects me.

- ☐ Completely disagree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Completely agree

Please comment:

15. I feel my Chinese student respects my culture.

- ☐ Completely disagree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Completely agree

Please comment:

16. I am comfortable telling my Chinese student when I do not understand something he/she says.

- ☐ Completely disagree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Completely agree

Please comment:

17. I think that our different cultural backgrounds make our relationship difficult.

- ☐ Completely disagree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Completely agree

Please comment:

18. What are the advantages of supervising Chinese students?

19. What are the challenges of supervising Chinese students?

20. Thank you very much for your time!

If you would like to receive a copy of research finding by email, please leave your email in the Comment box below:

21. Request for interview

I am very keen to hear about your relationship with your Chinese students. If you would like to share your experiences with me, I would be more than happy to meet you at a place where is convenient for you. Please leave your name and contact information (email/phone) in the Comment box below, I will contact you to arrange a time for me to interview you.