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Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHINESE LEARNERS STUDYING IN BRITAIN.....	7
1.2 THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT OF CHINESE LEARNERS STUDYING IN BRITAIN	9
1.3 STUDIES ON CHINESE LEARNERS STUDYING IN BRITAIN: INTRODUCTION	12
1.4 STUDIES ON IDENTITY AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING: INTRODUCTION	14
1.5 MY RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY.....	18
1.6 MY OWN STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	19
1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY	21
1.8 STRUCTURE OF THESIS	23
CHAPTER TWO: A THEORETICAL FRAMING AND LITERATURE REVIEW.....	26
2.1 VIEWING LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND SLL THROUGH THE LENS OF POSTSTRUCTURALIST THEORY.....	27
2.2 UNDERSTANDING A SECOND LANGUAGE AS SYMBOLIC CAPITAL.....	30
2.2.1 <i>Insights from Bourdieu</i>	30
2.2.2 <i>English language as global symbolic capital</i>	33
2.3 UNDERSTANDING SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS AS PEOPLE	35
2.3.1 <i>Second language learners' hierarchy of needs</i>	35
2.3.2 <i>Second language learners' multiple identities</i>	37
2.3.3 <i>Second language learners' agency</i>	48
2.4 UNDERSTANDING SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AS SOCIAL PRACTICE	51
2.4.1 <i>The social turn in second language learning</i>	51
2.4.2 <i>Second language socialisation</i>	55
2.4.3 <i>Communities of practice</i>	58
2.4.4 <i>Second language learning and the (re)construction of identity</i>	60
2.5 REVIEW OF STUDIES ON GENDER IDENTITY AND SLL.....	62
2.5.1 <i>Gendered agency and resistance</i>	65
2.5.2 <i>Gendered access to linguistic resources</i>	67
2.5.3 <i>Gendered discursive interaction</i>	69
2.6 REVIEW OF STUDIES ON NATIONAL IDENTITY, SOCIAL CLASS IDENTITY AND SLL.....	71
2.7 SUMMARY	74
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	77
3.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AS A SITE OF MULTIPLE INTERPRETIVE PRACTICES	78
3.2 RESEARCHER REFLEXIVITY	80
3.3 THE RESEARCHER AND THE RESEARCHED.....	81
3.4 CONSTRUCTIVISM AS AN INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM	84
3.5 ETHNOGRAPHY AS A NATURALISTIC RESEARCH STRATEGY	88
3.6 CASE STUDY AS THE MAIN STRATEGY OF ENQUIRY	91
3.7 THE VALUE OF NARRATIVE APPROACH	94
3.8 THE PROJECT AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION	96

3.9 TRANSLATION AND TRANSCRIPTION	109
3.10 DATA ANALYSIS.....	110
3.11 THE THEMATIC STRUCTURING OF THE DATA CHAPTERS AND MY WRITING NOTES	116
3.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	117
3.13 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	118
3.14 THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE SIX PRIMARY PARTICIPANTS	119
3.15 SUMMARY	127
CHAPTER FOUR: GENDER IDENTITY AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING	129
4.1 GENDERED POWER RELATIONSHIP IN THE FAMILY.....	129
4.1.1 <i>A dominant father</i>	130
4.1.2 <i>'We belong to matrilineal society'</i>	133
4.2 GENDERED SELF-IMAGE AND GENDERED AGENCY	136
4.3 AN EXAMPLE OF THE IMPACT OF GENDERED AGENCY ON SLL: FINDING A GIRLFRIEND IN BRITAIN	141
4.4 GENDERED ACCESS TO LINGUISTIC RESOURCES AND INTERACTION OPPORTUNITIES	143
4.5 GENDERED INTERACTION IN THE CLASSROOM.....	147
4.5.1 <i>Teacher-student talk on gender-related topics</i>	147
4.5.2 <i>Teacher-student talk on sex-related issues</i>	150
4.5.3 <i>Teacher-student talk on homosexuality topics</i>	154
4.5.4 <i>Challenging masculine displays</i>	157
4.5.5 <i>Zhu's discursive gendered practices in the classroom</i>	160
4.6 NEGOTIATION OF GENDER IDENTITY IN VARIOUS CONTEXTS.....	163
4.6.1 <i>Adapting to new gendered behaviour and values</i>	163
4.6.2 <i>Resisting new gendered behaviour and values</i>	167
4.7 SUMMARY	170
CHAPTER FIVE: CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AND DISCURSIVE SOCIAL INTERACTION	173
5.1 THE CASE STUDY OF JIN: A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERING HIMSELF AS A CHINESE	174
5.1.1 <i>Confused nationality on the first arrival</i>	174
5.1.2 <i>Jin's response to teachers' perceptions of his national identity</i>	176
5.1.3 <i>Finding the difference from South Korean students</i>	177
5.1.4 <i>Displaying the role of a Chinese</i>	178
5.2 RAISING THE AWARENESS OF BEING A CHINESE	180
5.3 INTERACTION WITH BRITISH PEOPLE: TO BECOME MULTICULTURAL	185
5.3.1 <i>The opportunities and obstacles of meeting British people</i>	185
5.3.2 <i>To adapt to British culture</i>	188
5.4 INTERACTION WITH OVERSEAS STUDENTS OF OTHER NATIONALITIES.....	193
5.4.1 <i>The difficulties of developing friendship with other international students</i>	193
5.4.2 <i>Attitudes towards Japanese and South Korean students</i>	195
5.5 INTERACTION WITH CHINESE CO-NATIONALS	198
5.5.1 <i>The disadvantages of socialising with Chinese co-nationals</i>	198
5.5.2 <i>The advantages of socialising with Chinese co-nationals</i>	202
5.6 INTERACTION WITH STUDENTS FROM TAIWAN	205
5.7 SUMMARY	210

CHAPTER SIX: SOCIAL CLASS IDENTITY AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING	213
6.1 AWARENESS OF THEIR FAMILY CLASS POSITIONS	214
6.2 PERCEPTIONS OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES	218
6.3 PERCEPTIONS OF PART-TIME JOBS	221
6.4 THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CLASS IDENTITY ON FRIENDSHIP	223
6.5 DISCUSSING SOCIAL CLASS ISSUES IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM.....	227
6.6 SOCIAL CLASS IDENTITY AND CONSUMPTION.....	231
6.6.1 <i>Changing consumption of fashion</i>	232
6.6.2 <i>Changing consumption of food</i>	234
6.6.3 <i>A counter example: Jun's changing consumption practices in Britain</i>	238
6.7 SUMMARY	240
CHAPTER SEVEN: LANGUAGE LEARNER IDENTITY AND LEGITIMATE PERIPHERAL PARTICIPATION	242
7.1 LANGUAGE TEACHERS' ROLE IN ENABLING CHINESE LEARNERS' PARTICIPATION IN BRITISH SOCIETY	243
7.1.1 <i>Presenting British English norms</i>	243
7.1.2 <i>Introducing British cultural practices</i>	245
7.2 LANGUAGE TEACHERS' ROLE OF DISCOURAGING CHINESE LEARNERS' PARTICIPATION IN BRITISH SOCIETY.....	249
7.3 LANGUAGE TEACHERS' CATEGORISATION OF STUDENTS.....	253
7.4 A COUNTER EXAMPLE: MATT'S DIFFERENT CATEGORISATION OF STUDENTS	257
7.5 THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS' IDENTIFICATION OF CHINESE STUDENTS AS THE FOREIGN OTHER	259
7.6 CHINESE STUDENTS' STANCES.....	262
7.7 A COUNTER EXAMPLE: FAN'S DIFFERENT STANCE	266
7.8 CHINESE STUDENTS' DIFFERENT INVESTMENT IN ENGLISH LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM	268
7.9 CHINESE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH LEARNING EXPERIENCE IN THE NATURALISTIC CONTEXT	270
7.10 THE CASE STUDY OF JIN: NEGOTIATING LANGUAGE LEARNER'S IDENTITY THROUGH NATURAL ENGLISH LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND EFL CLASSROOM.....	274
7.10.1 <i>English acquisition in natural English contexts</i>	275
7.10.2 <i>EFL learning experience in the language school</i>	279
7.10.3 <i>To be or not to be</i>	280
7.10.4 <i>Comment</i>	281
7.11 SUMMARY	283
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION	286
8.1 ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS	287
8.2 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY	288
8.3 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS	292
8.3.1 <i>Conceptual implications</i>	292
8.3.2 <i>Practical implications</i>	295
8.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH IN THE AREA OF IDENTITY AND SLL.....	299
8.4.1 <i>Additional procedures that could have been used</i>	299
8.4.2 <i>Studies with the data I excluded</i>	300
8.4.3 <i>Studies with new data</i>	302
8.5 MY EVALUATION OF AND REFLECTION ON RESEARCH PROCESSES	304
8.5.1 <i>Revising research questions</i>	305

8.5.2 <i>Learning from pilot study</i>	307
8.5.3 <i>Unavoidable participation in classroom observation</i>	308
8.5.4 <i>Struggle in data analysis</i>	310
8.5.5 <i>The multiple roles of the researcher</i>	311
8.6 CONCLUDING COMMENT	313
REFERENCES	316
APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR NARRATIVE ENQUIRY	338
APPENDIX II: EXAMPLES OF FIELD NOTES	339

Chapter One: Introduction

March 21, 2006

05, 06

05, I stayed with my parents as an effeminate daughter; 06, I come to the UK to learn independence.

05, I gave up a person who loved me; 06, a person who loves me gives me up.

05, I encouraged my best friend to stop her life as being a single woman; 06, I begin my life as a single woman desperately.

05, I went shopping by taxi every day; 06, I go shopping in supermarket on foot every day.

05, I hardly found one or two white hair; 06, I consider using black hair dye.

05, my English was really very poor; 06, I can roughly chat with British people.

05, I thought no one could be more excellent than me in the world; 06, I think I am extremely inept.

05, I thought I was as noble as a princess; 06, I find myself belong to the same class of cleaners.

05, I always looked forward to freedom; 06, I always wish time can go back.

05, everything depended on others; 06, everything depends on me.

From 2005 to 2006 has been a big transition in my life. I lost many many many... things, my heart hurts, but I still warn myself no matter what kind of result I will have, I should answer the paper of my life seriously. (Yin's diary, 21/03/06)

Yin is one of fifty thousand Chinese students studying in Britain. During her one-year English language learning journey in the UK, Yin has not only developed her English language competence, but has also experienced homesickness, loneliness, financial adjustment, educational difficulty, and the reconstruction of the self-image. In fact, the improvement in Yin's English language competence appears to pale in comparison to the unexpected dramatic changes which have happened to her perceptions of herself. During her English language learning journey abroad, Yin's social development becomes fundamental, not ancillary, to her second language learning (SLL). This diary entry vividly

demonstrates that the SLL process is not just an aspect of human cognitive development, but a participation in the kinds of activities which everyday lives comprise; second language learners' cognitive and social development cannot be seen as distinct entities. Moreover, Yin's story exemplifies Wenger's (1998) notion of the unpredictable nature of learning process — 'situations that bring learning into focus are not necessarily those in which we learn most, or most deeply' (p. 8). People may learn less about what is expected in a given situation, but learn more about something else instead.

Yin's experience is not alien to other Chinese students, who also experience frustration and anxiety and undergo a process of self-reconstruction during their English language learning journeys in the UK. However, every Chinese learner solves their problems and adjusts to the British context in various ways according to their own profiles. Every language learner is alone with a unique experience, an experience tailored to, by and for that individual. 'Who Yin is' is not only a factor of Yin's native talent for her English language learning, her educational background and her motivation, but also a product of her gender, her nationality, her social class, her personality, her ability and her experiences. In sum, her learning and living in a second language will impact on these elements of her identity.

This thesis is about the relationship between learning English as a second language and the negotiation of identity. It focuses not on how learners master the intricacies of the grammar and the lexicon, but on how they develop the perceptions of themselves during the second language study abroad journey. The thesis is based on an empirical study of learning English and using English by Chinese learners in British language schools, along

with an investigation of how the Chinese learners' identities influence their language learning, and how their identities are reconstructed during their English language learning journeys in the UK. This present study seeks to draw together understanding from the fields of SLL, studies of identity, and insights from poststructuralist theory. The approach taken is interdisciplinary, but the underlying theoretical position of this thesis is that identity is discursively constructed and embedded within social practices and broader ideological frameworks. While SLL remains a central issue, it will be connected to the consciousness of gender, national, social class and language learner identities.

The purpose of Chapter One of this thesis is to explain why Chinese learners' English learning journeys in Britain need a special study in relation to identity. To achieve this purpose, I will firstly look at the historical background and contemporary context of Chinese learners studying in Britain, and then introduce some of the literature about Chinese learners in Britain and studies on identity and SLL, just enough to set the context. Subsequently, I will state my rationale for this present study. The research questions and the significance of this present study will also be presented. I will end this chapter by describing the structure of the thesis.

1.1 The historical background of Chinese learners studying in Britain

The history of Chinese learners studying in Britain can be traced back to 1877. Thirty-four Chinese navy students were sent to study in the UK, by the government of the Qing Dynasty in 1877, 1881, 1886 and 1897 successively (Song, 2003). This small group of

Chinese learners travelled to the UK in search of wealth and power to change the unenlightened status of half-feudal and half-colonial Chinese society. Most of them served as navy officers upon their return to China. Yan Fu, an influential ideologist and educator in modern Chinese history, was a member of this group. He studied at the Navy Academy in Greenwich, England, from 1877 to 1879, and then developed a great interest in Western science. Yan Fu is well-known for his translation including Thomas Huxley's 'Evolution and Ethics', Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations', John Stuart Mill's 'On Liberty' and Herbert Spencer's 'Study of Sociology'. The ideas of 'natural selection' and 'survival of the fittest' were introduced to Chinese readers through Huxley's work for the first time. Yan Fu was respected as 'the first Chinese who masters Western science', and became the first chancellor of Peking University (Ye, 2007).

From 1927 to 1948, the Chinese learners studying in Britain were sent by the government of the Republic of China or their families (Song, 2003). In this period, one group of Chinese learners studied politics and economy in Britain in order to find solutions to problems of modern China. The representatives were Luo Longji, Wang Zaoshi, and Zhu Anping, who studied at The London School of Economics and Political Science from 1926 to 1927, from 1929 to 1930, from 1935 to 1938 respectively. All of them were students of Harold Joseph Laski, a well-known English political theorist and economist (Ye, 2007). When they returned to China, they devoted themselves to democratic activities and Chinese reforms and revolutions. The other group of Chinese learners concentrated on developing their expertise in other academic areas. Many of them became successful authors and scientists in China, exemplified by Xu Zhimo, a poet and prose writer, who

studied at the University of Cambridge from 1921 to 1922; Qian Zhongshu, a writer and literature researcher, who studied at the University of Oxford from 1935 to 1937; and Li siguang, a geologist, who studied at the University of Birmingham from 1913 to 1918 (Ye, 2007). They made great contributions to establish new humanities, social science and science research system, and the development of industry of modern China.

During these two periods, many Chinese learners, driven by their motivation to change the poor and weak status of China, travelled to the UK to learn advanced Western technology and ideology. They experienced financial problems, language difficulties, mental pressure, even persecution during their study abroad journeys (Song, 2003). When then returned to China, they used what they had learnt in the UK to address the problems of Chinese society. Even nowadays, their spirits, their success and their study abroad experiences apparently continue to inspire young Chinese learners choosing to study in the UK (Song, 2003). However, this historical root has seldom been mentioned in the literature on Chinese learners in the UK. I outline briefly the history of Chinese learners studying in Britain, as it not only provides the historical background of this present study, but also helps me to understand some typical issues of the current wave of Chinese student migration in the UK, such as why Chinese students have high expectations of British education and its value to future careers; and why they perceive study abroad as a way to ‘strengthen’ themselves.

1.2 The contemporary context of Chinese learners studying in Britain

In general, there were no Chinese learners travelling to Britain from 1949 to 1979, because of the broken foreign relationship between the governments of the People's Republic of China and the UK. However, with the Chinese 'opening-up' policy and economic reforms in 1978, there has been significant student migration flows from China. The number of Chinese students studying in the UK had risen dramatically from 2,368 in 1994 to 47,740 in 2004 (Shen, 2005). According to a senior official at the Education Section of the UK Embassy in Beijing, there were around 60,000 Chinese students studying in the UK in 2007 (China Daily, 2007). This very large increase in the number of Chinese students is considered as a direct result of the opening of China to the West, the rising demand from Chinese students for access to higher education in the West, particularly English-speaking countries, British government policy, British university recruitment strategy (Rastall, 2006), and the fierce competition for National University Entrance Examination in China together with family pressure for university education (Shen, 2005).

China's booming economy has contributed strongly to the recent influx of Chinese students pursuing academic qualifications in Britain. According to the report of the People's Daily Online (2004), 50 million Chinese families qualified for the rating of middle class in 2002, with per household annual income of 75,000 Yuan and owning 310,000 Yuan of assets on average. It is expected that 100 million Chinese families will reach the level of a middle-class income by 2010. Middle-class people in China are capable of purchasing private houses and cars, and can afford the costs of education and holidays (Xin, 2004). Generally, the majority of Chinese students studying in the UK come from middle-class and upper-class families, who are capable of paying the high cost of

overseas education.

Blair's speech on opening 'a window on the world' in 1999 launched the British government's worldwide educational campaign. This was followed by a series of changes in policies aimed at attracting international students to study in British further and higher education. Key policies changes include simplifying visa application procedures and legalising overseas students' part-time work during term time (Shen, 2005). Recently, the British government has implemented new legislation, which allows foreign postgraduates to remain in the UK for one to two years after their graduation in order to pursue a career (China Daily, 2007). The British government is aiming for 25% of the global share of the Chinese student market (Rastall, 2006). In 2007, the UK received the highest number of students from China after the US (China Daily, 2007).

Since most Chinese students take private or full-cost undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Britain, they make a substantial financial contribution to British universities. For example, from 2003 to 2004, around 43,000 Chinese students were registered in the British higher education system, and they paid at least 300 million pounds in tuition fees. In the case of the University of Essex, Chinese students' contributions were equivalent to as much as 29% of government grants (Shen, 2005). The financial rewards for universities and private schools entering the Chinese market usually come from the investment made by students and their parents. These privately funded students clearly constitute a special segment of the market with their own demands and concerns, which have started to draw the attention of researchers and educators in the UK.

1.3 Studies on Chinese learners studying in Britain: Introduction

In order to make Chinese students benefit as much as they should from their investment, there has been a rising number of research studies focusing on Chinese students' learning and living experiences in the UK: Jin and Cortazzi (2006), for instance, analysed changing aspects of learning and 'cultures of learning' in China, in relation to the learning needs of Chinese learners studying in higher education in the UK. Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) conducted a two-academic-year empirical study on the psychological and sociocultural adjustments of two cohorts of Chinese students taking a foundation course in academic English language at a British university. Gieve and Clark (2006) criticised the 'supposedly consistent Chinese behaviours in Western classrooms' (p. 54) and the deficit model which arose from this. They presented the importance of small culture explanations which could help educators to escape the 'apparent conformity of generalisations about Chinese learners' (p. 63). Gu and Schweisfurth (2006) looked at how factors other than culture influence the adaptation process by comparing the change process between a set of Chinese teachers and a set of Chinese learners studying in Britain. Most of these studies were set in university contexts, while only a few studies have explored in depth the learning and living experiences of Chinese learners in language schools at pre-university level, especially in relation to their identities. This study is an attempt to start redressing the balance.

Apart from the academic reputation of Britain, its history and richness in culture, being the gateway to the rest of Europe, the opportunity to learn English in a traditional native

English-speaking country is a significant incentive for Chinese learners choosing Britain as their destination for study abroad. In 2007, there were around 9,000 Chinese students in British private schooling or doing foundation courses ahead of university (Lin, 2008). In general, teachers and students have long believed in the powers of study abroad for second language education. The extensive authentic interaction with native speakers that in-country living can provide cannot be duplicated in the classroom. Given the high cost of study abroad in time and money and the importance of authentic interaction in English language acquisition, it seems that Chinese learners' English language learning journeys in Britain do not always end with happiness and success. According to cognitive theories of SLL, the more second language learners are exposed to and practise the second language, the more proficient they will become (Spolsky, 1989). In fact, extensive exposure to English does not guarantee Chinese learners plentiful opportunities to practice the target language, especially to have meaningful conversations with native speakers.

SLL is not simply 'the acquisition of a new set of grammatical, lexical, and phonological forms', but 'a struggle of concrete socially constituted and always situated beings to participate in the symbolically mediated lifeworld of another culture' (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000, p. 155). In other words, SLL is not just a matter of acquiring pre-given linguistic knowledge, but involves a complex process of negotiating identities, cultures, or power relations. However, Chinese learners engagement in English language learning is influenced by their perceptions of 'who they are', and 'what they are allowed to do' in relation to British society, which structures opportunities for the realisation of their English learning desires. It appears that Chinese learners' identities do play a vital role in

influencing their English learning and living experiences in Britain, but the English language learning journey in Britain also redefines Chinese learners themselves publicly, socially, and personally. For this reason, I now turn to the studies on identity and SLL.

1.4 Studies on identity and second language learning: Introduction

Identity as a theoretic construct is not a new idea. It was originally developed within the field of psychology, where the major focus of researchers was the altering of an individual's state and condition over time through changes in their contexts (e.g., Erikson, 1968). Initially, for psychologists, 'an individual's identity' represented a relatively stable construct, and it was supposed to change only four to five times during an individual's life, usually when that person entered a new age group, for instance, from a child to a young adult to an elderly man or woman. Later on, the development of social psychology enabled more advanced understanding of identity as a social construct. One of the notable leaders in the field, Tajfel, introduced the term 'social identity' and defined it as 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership' (Tajfel, 1974, p. 69). Social identity therefore is the sense of 'belonging' to a particular social group, whether defined by ethnicity, by language, or any other means. Although Tajfel and other contributors to his volume introduced a new concept of individual understanding of group membership, Tajfel's social identity theory was criticised for being too statistical, and focusing excessively on the self, rather than on the dialogical

interrelationship between self and group (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p. 246-247). Tajfel seemed fail to conceptualise identity as a dynamic process of continual emerging and becoming.

In the field of applied linguistics, identity has been receiving increased attention since the recognition of its importance in SLL, demonstrated by Norton Pierce (1995) in her study of immigrant women in Canada. Considering that traditional SLL theories have drawn ‘artificial distinctions’ between ‘the individual and the social’, which led to ‘arbitrary mapping of particular factors onto either the individual or the social with little rigorous justification’ (p. 4), Norton (2000) developed a comprehensive theory of identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context. She introduced the term ‘social identity’ to refer to ‘how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how that person understands possibilities for the future’ (p. 5). According to Norton (2000, p. 5), language learners cannot ‘be defined unproblematically as motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited’, as all these ‘affective factors are frequently socially constructed in inequitable relations of power, changing over time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways in a single individual’.

In recent years, there has been increasing research on the relationship between identity and language learning. Identity has gained footing in the SLL field, and has become a research area in its own right (Zuengler and Miller, 2006). Researchers from various fields have brought diverse perspectives to our understanding of the relationship between language, language learning and identity. For example, Miller (2003) studied the

relationship between speaking and social identity among migrant students in Australian high schools. McKay and Wong (1996) conducted an ethnographic study with a group of Chinese first language immigrant adolescents attending high school in the US. These individual students managed their identities differently in this complex environment, with differential consequences for their ambitions and success in learning English oral and literacy skills. Pavlenko (2001a) explored the transformation of female immigrant ESL learners' gender identities and subject positions, as documented in a large corpus of autobiographical narratives. Liang (2006) examined classroom code-switching in a high school in Canada in relation to Chinese immigrant students' individual and group identities, and to functional use of Chinese and English. Compared to the greater attention given to explore the relationship between immigrant learners' identities and their SLL experience, relatively few research studies look at this relationship in a study abroad context, which is noted by Freed (1995) as a special case of second language acquisition. Pellegrino Aveni (2005) explored the problems faced by a group of American students embarking on study abroad programmes, spending time in Russia, and having to interact and express their personalities in a second language. In particular, she paid attention to learners' 'face' and self-esteem, and how they constructed their senses of selves through SLL and use. Kinginger (2004) used the story of a young American woman's French learning experience in France to elucidate the importance of personal history, imagination, and desire in the organisation of lived experience related to language learning, and the significance of access to social networks, or of marginality within such networks, in the process of (re)constructing a coherent and satisfying identity.

The use of different theories and methodologies by different scholars has affected the ways in which researchers conceptualise identity, and it has also resulted in the simultaneous emergence and use of different terms that describe identity as a sociocultural construct (Norton, 2000). Norton Pierce (1995), Morgan (1997) and Byram and Fleming (1998), for instance, focused on social identity in their research studies, Duff and Uchida (1997) focused on sociocultural identity, Schechter and Bayley (1997) and Edwards (2006) on cultural identity, Leung, Harris and Rampton (1997) on ethnic identity, Pavlenko (2001a) and Ohara (2001) on gender identity, James and Woll (2004) on race and disabled identities, and Liang (2006) emphasised individual and group identities. Norton (2000) argues that despite the apparent differences between researchers' conceptualisations of identity, most researchers agree that the (re)construction of identity needs to be understood with reference to power relationships between language learners and target language speakers, since the power relationships can legitimate some identities and forms of participation, yet devalue others in specific sites of practice.

This brief introduction to research studies in identity and SLL reflects a significant theoretic trend in the recent SLL field — understanding second language learners as social actors, whose identities are multiple, varied and emergent from their daily lived experiences (Hall, J. K., 2002). This present study is located within this context. While the concept of identity will be discussed in greater detail in Section 2.3.2, I will present my orientation towards this present study in the next section.

1.5 My rationale for this study

In 2003, I travelled to the UK, and became one of the thousands of Chinese learners who leave their home to experience the world, and more specifically, to further my education and to improve my English. I started my master's programme in Language Learning and Education at the University of York, and then I continued studying on a doctoral programme in Language Studies at Canterbury Christ Church University. The motivation to conduct this present study came from the multiple identity changes I intuitively felt during my stay in Britain. In my experience as an international student, I felt that the reconstruction of identities was unavoidable during the study abroad journey. That is, in order to adapt to a new language and a new culture, Chinese learners have to change some aspects of their identities. Then, these Chinese learners are no longer the personas they were, when they left China. They need to change in order to accommodate to their new lives between English language and Chinese language, and between English culture and Chinese culture. For instance, they have to learn new cultural ways of thinking with the English language, new writing styles within the British academic culture, new appropriate cultural ways of social interaction at the verbal and non-verbal levels, and in general to grow into different behaviour styles and ideologies.

I noticed in myself and my peers that this transformational process did not always go smoothly, and many Chinese learners struggled to succeed in their study abroad journeys. They had to make constant efforts to adapt to the British academic system and British society, to overcome unexpected difficulties, and to stick with their learning goals.

Sometimes, the feeling of going through this transformational process could be very dreadful, and it reminds me of an American woman, Alice's description of her persistence of learning French in France in Kinginger's (2004) study. It feels like

putting your hand through something and you try and you try and you try and you can't get your hand through there, and finally it emerges on the other side. Like a plastic bag or somethin', you stretch and stretch and stretch it and finally it breaks and your hand goes through.

(p. 239)

I would like to understand more closely how Chinese learners go through their identity transformation processes during their study abroad journeys, particularly their English language learning journeys in Britain. From what I have observed and what I have experienced, I also hope this present study could enlighten some Chinese learners who are living through this experience, as well as educators who could become more supportive mentors.

1.6 My own study: Introduction and research questions

The broad aim of this study is to understand how Chinese young adults learn English during their journeys in Britain, through examining their speaking and behavioural discourse in a variety of contexts. The primary focus of this study is the influence of Chinese learners' identities on their English language learning stay. I explore the extent and ways in which Chinese learners' identities are related to their complex social interaction in

Britain, and discuss how learning opportunities in both formal and informal English language learning contexts are associated with their identities. The secondary focus is the social reconstruction of Chinese learners' gender, national, social class and language learner's identities during their English language learning journeys. The theoretical underpinnings of this present study are drawn from poststructuralism.

In an English social environment, Chinese learners express a desire to be accepted by those around them, including native English speakers and non-native English speakers, to feel validated as intelligent, mature individuals, worthy of friendship and respect. In a particular sense, Chinese learners' levels of proficiency in English relate to their pathways towards integration in natural English speaking contexts, where they are no longer supported by English language teachers. Besides the social context outside the classroom, this study also considers the language school as an agent of social construction. Although the language school may promote learning of an academic nature, as indeed it intends to do, whatever takes place linguistically within the school walls in general and in the classroom in particular potentially contributes to the shaping of Chinese learners' identities.

This present study primarily tracked six Chinese students for nine months, from their registration in long-term programmes in three language schools in the UK, until their completion of their programmes. Data sources in this part included the following: classroom observation; observation of microcontexts of the language schools and other social contexts outside the language school (e.g. supermarket, high street, coffee shop, bank, travel agency, mobile phone shop); talks with students; phone and email conversations with students; student diaries; talks with language school teachers; email

conversations with language school teachers; talks with language school administrators; the collection of work samples and school documents; and my research diaries. In addition, narrative interviews have been carried out with nine other Chinese students, who had been studying English in Britain for more than six months, to gain a broader view on the Chinese learners' English learning experiences in Britain from various academic backgrounds.

Although different data sources are used, the study places the Chinese learners' own accounts in central position, in order for the reader to hear the voices from the learning agents themselves, rather than the perceptions from the language teachers or the researcher. The central research questions which derive from the above are:

- a) In what ways do Chinese learners' identities influence their engagement with ESL learning in Britain?
- b) Are Chinese learners' identities negotiated and changed through their ESL learning sojourns in Britain? And if so, how?
- c) If there are changes in Chinese learners' identities during their ESL learning sojourns in Britain, what is the impact of these changes on their continuing ESL learning?

1.7 Significance of this study

Although the reported contributions of SLL and identity are impressive, most of the studies

focus on immigrant and/or minority learners, while little has addressed learners in the study abroad context. In addition, most study abroad literature investigates individual differences attributed to their second language achievement outcome, rather than seeking for deep understanding of the qualities and specifics of student experiences abroad (Kinger, in press). The purpose of this study is to address the issue of SLL and identity in a study abroad context. Specifically, it aims at investigating the relationship between gender, national, social class and language learner identities and SLL with regard to the lack of attention to national, social class and language learner identities in the field of SLL research.

Such a research project has important implications for English language teaching and British educational system due to the large number of Chinese students currently involving in various language programmes in private language schools and universities in Britain. There is a growing need for British educators who are knowledgeable about how to better support Chinese learners in Britain. Therefore, there is a need for studies that provide considerable depth and insight into Chinese learners' English learning and living experiences in Britain. From reading this thesis, Chinese learners may realise that they are not the only one in the boat, and their personal experiences in the British academic and social culture are common to others as well. This awareness by itself can be helpful, so that Chinese learners can find emotional support by sharing their experiences and realising the complicated relationship between their identities and English language learning. Educators can also benefit from reading this thesis for gaining insightful information about the experiences of Chinese learners they may be working with, and then increase their

understanding of what kind of needs and problems Chinese learners need to face and to cope with during their English language learning journeys in Britain.

1.8 Structure of thesis

In this chapter, I have introduced the historical and contemporary contextual backgrounds of this present study, the location of this present study within broader work, my orientation, my choice of research setting and overall data collection strategy, my research questions, and the significance of the study presented in this thesis. The remaining chapters of the thesis cover the followings:

In Chapter Two, I locate my study within the larger framework of poststructuralism in general and the social turn of SLL research in particular. In the first part, I discuss in some depth the theories of viewing a second language as symbolic capital; second language learners as human agencies with hierarchy needs and multiple identities; and the SLL process as a social practice. In the second part, I examine studies that have been conducted on gender identity, national identity and social class identity in the SLL field respectively.

In Chapter Three, I argue that the complex relationship between identity and SLL needs to be explored in the qualitative research tradition. In the first part, I address the relationship between the researcher and the researched in terms of reflexivity, and then discuss the research methodology I used, including ethnography and case study, in the light of the constructivist paradigm. In the second part, I describe the research methods I used in the data collection process, and the principles by which I organised my data for the purpose

of analysis. In the final part, I introduce the six primary participants in this present study: Jin, Zhu, Fan, Lan, Xu and Yin.

In Chapter Four, I focus on the relationship between gender identity and SLL. I explain how the six participants' gendered self-images are influenced by their parents' gendered roles. Then, I discuss how the participants' gendered agency influences their learning and use of English; and how their access to linguistic resources and interaction opportunities are constructed in terms of their gender identities. In addition, I look at the participants' discursive gendered practices in the language classroom. Finally, I investigate how their gender identities are negotiated in various social contexts.

In Chapter Five, I concern the relationship between national identity and SLL. In the first part, I focus on the reconstruction of the participants' Chinese national identities during their English language learning journeys in Britain. The second part explores how their Chinese national identities influence their interaction with British people, overseas students of other nationalities, Chinese co-nationals and Taiwanese students.

In Chapter Six, I address the relationship between social class identity and SLL. I firstly look at how the participants identify the social class status of their families. I then examine how the participants perceive economic inequalities and doing part-time work in Britain, and how their social class identities influence their friendship. Finally, the display and reconstruction of their social class identities in various social contexts are discussed.

In Chapter Seven, I highlight the relationship between language learner identity and SLL. I firstly discuss English language teachers' contradictory roles in promoting and limiting Chinese students' participation in British society in terms of their perceptions of

Chinese students' language learner identities. Secondly, I explore the participants' perceptions of their language learner identities in relation to their diverse investment in English learning. Finally, I use the case study of Jin to illustrate how he struggled between language teachers and language school's inappropriate categorisation of him as an EFL learner influenced by the IELTS, and his experiences of learning and using English in the natural English context.

In Chapter Eight, I answer the three research questions and summarise the findings of this present study. Implications for pedagogical practice and future research are then discussed. I conclude the thesis by providing my own reflections and comments on the research process.

Chapter Two: A Theoretical Framing and Literature Review

November 28, 2005

I Am a Study Robot

From my childhood till now, I have always felt that I am a study robot. I have to accept all the orders from human beings, and I can't fight against them, because they provide me electricity. I have no idea, no spirit, no freedom, but a lot of programmes edited by human beings. Although I really wish I could be released, I find I can't. Long-term inspection and control make me lose the instinct of resistance. Human beings say, 'you are perfect and you are the best.' Yes, of course, because I am made by them. Therefore, I can only live in a continuously updating electronic world, and I try to do the best. Even when I come to a programme maintenance shop in Britain, the programmer can't release me. The programme given by my creator has turned out to be a virus, which has spread to every screw in my body. Maybe, when all the electricity is used up, I still won't get freedom. Because I am a controlled robot forever... (Yin's diary, 28/11/05)

Yin describes herself as a 'no idea, no spirit, no freedom' study robot, who has to execute 'a lot of programmes edited by human beings', and 'can't be released' even in 'a programme maintenance shop in Britain'. It appears that Yin perceives herself as a mechanical learning product and her English learning experience in Britain as part of a continuous mechanical process. This has drawn my attention to question the nature of the learner and the nature of the learning and teaching process. As Firth and Wagner (1997) criticise, in the orthodox social psychological hegemony in second language learning (SLL), second language learners are treated as 'subjects' instead of complex and nuanced social beings; the SLL process is simply viewed as a narrow technical model of interaction (one with an essentialised interlocutor, with essentialised identities, who speak essentialised language), rather than a broader sociolinguistically driven model which can

account for some of the less easily defined characteristics of communication. Considering the imbalance between cognitive and mechanistic orientation, and social and contextual orientation towards SLL research, with the former one in the ascendancy, there was an explicit call for more interdisciplinary, socially informed SLL research in the mid-1990s (Block, 2003). This study follows a recent trend in the applied linguistics literature that views second language learners as ‘the flesh-and-blood individuals who are doing the learning’ (Kramsch, 2006, p. 98) and SLL as a fundamentally social, cultural and temporal activity (Norton, 2000; Lantolf, 2000; Miller, 2003; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). It attempts to relate social theory to SLL, to explore and understand the social nature of SLL. This chapter moves across a number of related theoretical fields and considerations, including understanding from poststructuralism, current theories which view a second language as symbolic capital, second language learners as people and SLL in essentially social terms, and an overview of insights from sociolinguistic and sociocultural perspectives in SLL. In this way, it sets out the groundwork for theorising links between identity and SLL. The evidence of studies on gender, national and social class identities and SLL will then be presented.

2.1 Viewing language, identity and SLL through the lens of poststructuralist theory

Poststructuralism is especially significant to this study, because it links language, subjectivity, social organisation and power together, and puts language in the central place

(Richardson, 2003). Poststructuralism treats language as a fundamental social phenomenon and as an array of discourses imbued with meaning, instead of a chain of signs of grammar, phonology and lexicon (Pavlenko, 2002a). It argues that the meanings carried by language are never fixed, always open to question, always contestable, always temporary; and that language is the prime site of the construction of the self, the site of struggle and conflict, where power relations are acted out and contested (Burr, 2003). Poststructuralism focuses on language as the locus of social organisation, power and individual consciousness, and as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). The reason why the poststructuralist view of language is very important to my study is that it believes the self is a product of language and social interaction, and the constructive force of language in social interaction ensures a fragmented, shifting and temporary identity for all people. On the one hand, language is the place where identities are built, maintained, challenged and changed; on the other hand, both person and society can transform and reconstruct the meanings of language, although to change language is not easy (Burr, 2003).

According to Pavlenko (2001b), at the centre of poststructuralist theories of SLL are

the view of language as symbolic capital and the site of identity construction, the view of language acquisition as language socialisation and the view of L2 users as agents whose multiple identities are dynamic and flexible.

(p. 319)

Compared with sociopsychological approaches to SLL, which treat language as biologically innate phenomenon and SLL as a unified and homogeneous cognitive process, poststructuralist approaches provide a more context-sensitive way of theorising social

impact on SLL. Poststructuralism is employed as the ground theory of the present study, because it allows me to examine how gender, national, social class and language learner identities of Chinese students, on the one hand, structure their access to English linguistic resources and their opportunities for interaction with native English speakers, and, on the other hand, are constituted and reconstituted in their English learning journeys in Britain.

Pavlenko (2002a, p. 295-298) sums up the advantages of poststructuralist approaches to SLL research as followings: (1) they address ‘the multilingual reality of the contemporary world’, and try to ‘avoid monolingual and monocultural biases’; (2) they focus on ‘diversity and multiplicity’, which consider second language learners as ‘legitimate speakers’, rather than ‘failed native speakers’; (3) they recognise ‘complex stratification in all societies’, and allow second language learners to seek multiple memberships from a range of cultures and communities, instead of only acculturating to the dominant culture; (4) they provide theoretical work to account for ‘ambiguities’, ‘complexities’ and ‘irregularities’ in the SLL process; (5) they recast learners’ ‘motivation as investment’, which is constructed and reconstructed ‘in particular social contexts’; (6) they link the social to the individual learners, and see second language learners’ ‘access to linguistic resources’ as influenced by ‘gatekeeping ideologies’ and practices linked to multiple identities; and (7) they view ‘social contexts as crucial’ in understanding SLL, and language as an inseparable part of ‘what constitutes these contexts’. These seven points help me to understand the complexity of the SLL process from different angles. The theoretical positions associated the seven points will be revealed in the data discussion chapters.

2.2 Understanding a second language as symbolic capital

This section consists of two subsections. In the first subsection, I will introduce Bourdieu's symbolic capital theory, and then discuss the strength and limitation of applying this theory to the SLL field. In the second subsection, I will focus on the implications of understanding English language as global symbolic capital.

2.2.1 Insights from Bourdieu

Bourdieu's symbolic capital theory has been introduced into the SLL field to explain the relationship between language and power (Norton, 2000; Pennycook, 2001; Pavlenko, 2001b; Miller, 2003; Shi, 2006). The view of language as symbolic capital is significant, because it links the individual and the social, tracing the process by which particular linguistic varieties and practices become imbued with values or are devalued in the linguistic market (Pavlenko, 2002a). In his discussion of the forms of capital, Bourdieu (1997) defines three forms of capital: economic capital, which is directly monetary power, and can be institutionalised in the form of property rights; social capital, which is made up of social connections and group memberships that can provide access to other forms of capital; and cultural capital, which is convertible to economic capital on certain conditions. Cultural capital also takes three forms: embodied cultural capital, which is dispositions, attitudes, and behaviour embedded in people's minds and bodies; objectified cultural

capital, which takes the form of material cultural goods that can be transferred between people; and institutionalised culture capital, which takes the form of various educational credentials or certificates. Most importantly, in Bourdieu's (1991) account, none of these forms of capital will operate unless they are accorded symbolic capital; in other words, all the capital must be recognised as having legitimacy and value within a particular field, otherwise, they will not be usable as capital. According to Pavlenko (2001c, citing Bourdieu), linguistic resources possess symbolic power, because they 'can be converted into economic and social capital' by providing 'access to more prestigious forms of education, desired positions in the workforce or the social mobility ladders' (p. 122). Therefore, linguistic resources, as a major part of cultural capital, can replace economic and social capital to construct power relationships between individuals, institutions and communities, through which symbolic and material resources in a society are produced, reproduced, validated and distributed (Shi, 2006). However, the symbolic power of language is unevenly distributed, and the linguistic products are not equally valued, and they may be differently valued in different markets (Miller, 2003). As Norton (2000) argues, in SLL context, target language speakers always control linguistic resources. Conversely, for example, the vast majority of students studied by Lippi-Green's (1997), are from socially and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and their linguistic varieties are not valued by educational authorities, bureaucracies, teachers or employers, who are authorised to control the linguistic resources.

Particularly influenced by Bourdieu's notion of the legitimate speaker, Norton (2001) states that power relations play a crucial role in social interaction between second language

learners and target language speakers, thus second language learners' language learning and social identity re-establishment processes must be understood with reference to a larger, and frequently inequitable social structure. Shi (2006) concludes that the notion of unequal symbolic power can be used to explain

(1) why the conventions of a dominant sociocultural group are most often seen as the norm, while subordinate groups are more likely to have to adapt to majority norms; (2) why it is usually the dominant group who has the say in determining what is legitimate, who is legitimate; 'who is in', 'who is out', 'how to be' or 'how to act'; (3) why there are usually damaging links between cross-cultural misunderstandings and deficits, as well as between cognitive incompetence and second language practices; and (4) why it is usually the dominated group who suffers the negative consequences of any languacultural differences and miscommunication.

(p. 4-5)

So far I have discussed Bourdieu's symbolic capital theory, which provides a useful tool for understanding SLL practices in relation to power relations and capital relations in social fields. While it has been argued that although Bourdieu's use of social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital is supposed to take people beyond economic determinism, the capital, trade, and market metaphors he uses still seem to leave people with an economic view of the world that suggests a rational model of capital accumulation (Friedman, 1990). Furthermore, although Bourdieu's notion of different versions of capital enable us to think about language use critically, there is an overreliance on determinist social power within the work of Bourdieu, power in language always depends on prior sociological notions of power. In other words, 'language can only act' in a way according to how it is 'backed' by social power relations in the social and cultural context (Bulter, 1997, P. 158). In this way,

‘the possibility of an agency that emerges from the margins of power’ is foreclosed (Butler, 1997, p. 156). It presupposes that people have no power to intervene how language acts. The issues about agency, resistance, and change will be discussed later.

2.2.2 English language as global symbolic capital

Pennycook (2001) suggests Bourdieu’s framework of ‘forms of capital’ is useful for analysing the global position of English in terms of ‘the problems posed by the global symbolic capital of English, the effects of the embodied linguistic/cultural capital of the native speaker, the power of the institutional linguistic/cultural capital of [the IELTS and] the TOEFL, and the draw of English because of the social and economic capital it promises’ (P. 125). The symbolic power of English language is closely related to its global status. Nowadays, the number of people who use the language as a second language is becoming a more significant factor than the number and wealth of native speakers in deciding the global importance of a language (Graddol, 2006). English currently serves as the undisputed language of science and technology (Nunan, 2003), and the only language in global business (Graddol, 2006). The status of English as the emerging global language contributes to the big number of Chinese students currently studying in Britain, since the popularity of English language and a degree attained in an English-speaking country usually secure a well-paid job in China (Shen, 2005). The Chinese students, who plan to further their studies in British universities, have to prepare for the IELTS test or the TOEFL test, as entry levels into the various stages of British higher education are dictated by

English language proficiency, and scores in the IELTS test or the TOEFL test are used as manageable proxy measures of academic readiness for mainstream university study. Through the design of the IELTS and the TOEFL, the institution sets the value of different linguistic products, at least for the purpose of assessment and credentialing. These values authorise particular students in turn, while disempowering and disadvantaging others. Accordingly, language teachers in Britain are responsible for teaching English language in terms of the requirements of the IELTS, since failure to do so may disadvantage the language learner in accessing British high education (see further discussion in Chapter Seven).

As a global language, Tanaka (2006) would argue that English should no longer be considered as the property of native English speakers, but a global property of people who wish to use it all over the world. However, there is still a wide spread belief that the native English speaker uses Standard English, and only the native English speaker has the right to decide on English language norms, thus native-English-speaker teachers will provide appropriate linguistic models for their students (Foley, 2007). Influenced by this belief, native English speakers have advantageous positions in the English language teaching market; even untrained native-speakers of English are preferred to trained non-native English speakers (Holliday, 2005; Foley, 2007). It appears that native English speakers possess superior symbolic power of English language than non-native English speakers. In the process of turning linguistic capital into economic capital, native English speakers have an advantage in accessing jobs teaching English worldwide compared to non-native English speakers. All this may in turn lead to students' desires for being taught by native

English speakers (Holliday, 2005).

In sum, conceptualising a second language as symbolic capital, particularly, conceptualising English language as global symbolic capital, helps me to think about what it means to learn English in an English-speaking country, why the IELTS has such strong impact on the Chinese learners' English language learning journeys in Britain, and how the Chinese learners perceive their native-English-speaker teachers in Britain.

2.3 Understanding second language learners as people

From a cognitive perspective, Kasper (1997) claims that SLL researchers need to peel away the multiple and complex layers that constitute real individuals in order to focus attention on one or two features of interest to them. But I believe SLL researchers will gain more by considering second language learners as real individuals rather than idealised abstractions. Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) suggest that viewing second language learners from a more holistic, concrete and less reduced perspective can generate significant insights. This section will portray second language learners as people, who have a range of needs; who possess historically constructed, complex, fluid social identities; and who have human agency.

2.3.1 Second language learners' hierarchy of needs

The theoretical work of Maslow reminds me to consider second language learners as

individual human beings, who have a range of different needs, and some needs take higher priority than others. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is often depicted as a pyramid consisting of five levels: the four lower levels are grouped together as 'deficiency needs', which include the physiological needs, the safety needs, the belongingness and love needs, and the esteem needs; while the top level is termed as 'growth needs', which contains the cognitive needs, the aesthetic needs, the self-actualization needs and the self-transcendence needs. According to Maslow, the higher needs in this hierarchy only come into focus when the lower needs in the pyramid are satisfied.

Considering most Chinese learners studying in Britain come from better off families (Shen, 2005), whose physiological needs and safety needs have already been fulfilled, I will focus on their belongingness and love needs, and their cognitive needs, both of which play important roles in Chinese learners' English language study abroad journeys. Maslow (1943) believes that humans strive for social acceptance, affiliations, a sense of belongingness and being welcome. Without these, many people may become susceptible to loneliness, social anxiety, and depression. Humans also have a need to increase their intelligence, and thereby pursue knowledge. Chinese learners travel thousands of miles to Britain to learn English language, and to meet their cognitive needs. As long distance separates Chinese learners from their families, belonging to a supportive community and having friendships become extremely crucial to them. In this case, although Maslow's hierarchy of needs is set forth as a general proposition and does not imply that everyone's needs should follow the same rigid pattern, it does help to explain why in some circumstances, Chinese learners are willing to sacrifice their opportunities of improving

their English language competence for their social needs (see further discussion in Section 5.5).

2.3.2 Second language learners' multiple identities

I am using the term 'identity' here to focus on what Wenger (1998, p. 5) calls 'a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities'. Identity is thus regarded both as a product of a given context (e.g. a second language classroom), and as playing a role in constituting the social practices of that context. Besides the constitutive link with context, identity is also historically embedded, and incorporates the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present. Rampton (1995) stresses that studies of identity must attend to local and autobiographical histories, along with representational resources and contexts. In other words, the link between identity, context and personal history is undisputable. Moving from the contextualised and historical nature of identity, I will then look at the multiple and dynamic nature of identity.

Sarup (1993, citing Lacan) points out that human beings do not have a fixed set of characteristics, and often build up a set of characteristics in a dialectic way. Everybody has many different identities all at the same time, and each of them does not exist in isolation from other identities. The substantial body of recent writing and research concerned with the notion of identity encompasses a range of aspects of identity, including social identity, gender identity, ethnic identity, racial identity, national identity, cultural identity,

sociocultural identity, class identity, feminist identity, linguistic identity, and so on (see, for instance, Lippi-Green, 1997; Gordon, 2004; Norton, 2000; Kubota, 2003; Blackledge, 2002; Schecter and Bayley, 1997; Duff and Ushida, 1997; Collins, 2006; McMahill, 1997; Pavlenko, 2001b). Miller (2003, 41) stresses the contemporary conceptualisation identity as ‘unitary labels and hard binary oppositions are rejected in favour of the conception of multiple identities’, ‘which are fluid, dynamic, contradictory, shifting, contingent and processual’.

Social constructionism also paints a picture of the person as multiple, fragmented and incoherent (Burr, 2003). Hall (1996) stresses that identities are not unified but increasingly fragmented, not singular but ‘multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions’ (p. 4). While Giddens (1991) suggests that a person should not think of themselves as fragmented, forced by diversity, rather, a person should make use of diversity to create ‘a distinctive self-identity which positively incorporates elements from different settings into an integrated narrative’ (p. 190).

Thus, one can see in the literature that there has been a fundamental shift away from inborn, original, essentialist notions of identity towards awareness of identity conceptualised as a process of continual emerging and becoming. In terms of the constructive process of identity, the theories of socialisation and discourse consider that ‘institutions play a crucial determining role: there is the family, the school, the place of work and, increasingly, the media’ (Sarup, 1996, P. xv). Woodward (2000) and Sarup (1996) argue that people’s identities are not entirely determined and shaped by social structures, because personal agency can also be found in the social constructionist account of the

person. Moreover, identity can be divided into two types: private identity, ‘how we see ourselves’; and public identity, ‘how others have typified us’ (Sarup, 1996, p. 14). Sarup (1993, citing Lacan) stated that how people presented themselves was always subject to interpretation by others, and peoples’ identities depended on recognition by others. However, Burr (2003) and Sarup (1996) believe that people must to some degree be able to take the initiative and choose (aspects of) their own identities.

When people learn and use a second language, they do so as individuals with multiple identities. In this present study, I look at Chinese learners’ identities from four different but interrelated perspectives: gender identity, national identity, class identity and language learner identity, because when I conducted pilot study in Crawley Language School from May 2005 to June 2005, the four perspectives of identities emerged repeatedly in my field notes and the informal conversations between the participants and me. Now, I turn to conceptualise gender identity, national identity, social class identity and language learner identity respectively.

Gender identity

Gender is an element essential to the second language learner’s identity. Recent discussions on gender and language have challenged fixed understandings of the gender binary in relation to language learning and use (Kubota, 2003). The framework of seeing men and women as undifferentiated and unitary groups, members of which have more in common with each other than with the members of the other group is problematic. Firstly, biology

cannot give a complete explanation of gender difference. Neither bodily nor genetic differences work all the time (Gove and Watt, 2000). Current work in neuroscience suggests that human brain functioning is a complex process, which is influenced by both nature and nurture, and is not easily reducible to male/female differences (see, for instance, Bing and Bergvall, 1996; Jaeger, 1998). The second fact is that in many cultures, gender as a system of social relations and as a way of interpreting human anatomy is not constrained to the male/female dichotomy, and humans may belong to three or four different genders (Lang, 1997; Hall, K., 2002). Furthermore, even in cultures that view gender as a dichotomous system, the social meanings and ideologies of normative masculinity and femininity are highly diverse and cannot be superimposed (Bonvillain, 1995). Third and most importantly, the focus on a male/female dichotomy may obscure oppression in terms of social class, ethnicity, race or religious. Norton and Pavlenko (2004a) consider gender not as a dichotomy or an individual property, but as a complex system of social relations and discursive practices differently constructed in local contexts. Consequently, it is inappropriate to assume that all men or all women have a lot in common with each other, just because of their biological makeup or exclusive social roles. Instead, gender emerges as a key dimension of identity that interacts with ethnicity, social class, age, and (dis)ability, and it is influenced by individual and collective and social and biological factors.

The poststructuralist view of gender foregrounds sociohistoric, cross-cultural, and cross-linguistic differences in gender construction, emphasising the fact that normative masculinities and femininities, as well as beliefs and ideas about gender relations, vary across cultures as well as over time within a culture (Pavlenko, 2004). Thus, when second

language learners travel to the target sociocultural environment, they will perceive new gendered ideologies and performance, and then will naturally and necessarily go through intercultural gendered transformations at different paces and with different intensities (Shi, 2006). Gender identity in this study, refers therefore to the learner's continually changing and developing sense of identity as a girl or as a boy, a woman or a man in the new social context. In theorizing the gendered nature of the Chinese learner's experience, I am concerned not only with their reconstructed ideology within the context of British society, but also the gendered access to the British public world, in which Chinese learners have the opportunity to interact with members of the target language community.

National identity

Nationality is yet another strand of this present study. The geographical region in which people are born provides them with a particular group membership — nationality (Hall, J. K., 2002, p. 32). Nationality is an imagined membership, because the members of the nations will never know most of their fellow-members; yet in their minds, each lives in an image of their community (Wodak, *et al.*, 1999). National identity, as an ideology, encompasses the ideas of belonging wherever you are, and of being recognised by the surrounding people. It is 'a construct, fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time' (Sarup, 1996, p. 131). Besides imagination, national identity is also an expression of a way of life, because ideology is present in 'not only what we think, but what we think about, what we feel, how we behave, and the pattern of all our social

relationships' (Burr, 2003, p. 85). There is a dialectical relationship between ideology and social practice. On the one hand, national identity influences people's behaviour and their interaction with others; on the other hand, their communicative experiences in the real world constantly assert, question and redefine their national identity amongst other aspects of identity.

Wodak *et al.* (1999, p. 25-26, citing Kolakowski) summarise five characteristics of national identity: (1) the substantial idea of 'a national spirit', which is expressed through 'certain cultural forms', and 'particular collective manners of behaviour'; (2) collective 'historical memory', no matter 'whether the content of historical memory is true, partly true or legendary'; 'the further into the past' the memory reaches, 'the more securely national identity is supported'; (3) common 'anticipation and future orientation', including worrying about what may become of a nation, trying to survive, making 'preparations for potential adversity', and thinking of a nation's 'future interests'; (4) 'national body', which 'manifests itself in discussions of national territories, landscapes and nature, as well as the physical artefacts which shape those elements'; and (5) 'a nameable beginning', which can be 'legends of a founding event or the first "founding fathers"'. Acknowledging that there are far more ways of looking at national identity than this one, I find this notion of five dimensions of national identity particularly useful, as it provides a theoretic framework to understand the constitutive elements of Chinese national identity.

Among various discourses about Chinese national identity, I will briefly introduce the current official discourse of Chinese national identity, which my data indicates that my research participants tended to subscribe to with regard to their educational backgrounds in

Mainland China. It is an official discourse in the sense that it is promoted by the government through the state curriculum. Since 1991, Chinese State Education Commission has introduced a new sense of belonging to the nation in terms of an emotional link with the homeland, territory, language and culture among Chinese students through school curriculum revision (Suresh, 2002). This revised curriculum constructs Chinese national identity from three perspectives: five thousand years of ancient civilisation, recent one hundred years of anti-imperialist resistance, and present great power status (Suresh, citing Clausen, 2002). The new official discourse of Chinese national identity basically promotes a pan-Chinese national identity (Guo and He, 1999; He and Guo, 2000; Suresh, 2002). According to He and Guo (2000), the pan-Chinese national identity can come in two forms: (1) a civic or territorial national identity, which considers all who live in the territories of People's Republic of China as Chinese citizens, encompassing the Hans and fifty-five non-Han ethnic minorities; and (2) a genealogical identity based on common descent from the Yellow Emperor (purportedly born in 2,704 B.C.), which transcends the extreme diversity of religious practices, family structures, spoken languages and regional cultures of population groups. It is apparent that the current official discourse of Chinese national identity is rooted in a territorial imagination of the state and common descent. In addition, Chinese history and Chinese culture centred around Confucianism has become an important component of the new official discourse of Chinese national identity (Guo and He, 1999). As will be discussed in the data sections, the official discourse of Chinese national identity continues to wield a strong influence on the Chinese learners' utterances and behaviours in Britain.

The personal dimension of Chinese national identity appears on the one hand in relation to the current official discourse of Chinese national identity I presented above, and on the other hand, as Wodak *et al.* (1999) suggest, in relation to an individual's uniqueness. Thus, it is not surprising to find Chinese learners making delicate manoeuvres about 'being Chinese' in Britain, according to their places of origin, family backgrounds, dialects, educational experiences and personal life experiences. The global mobility of Chinese learners, who leave China for education, results in making their national identities being not only a product of Chinese upbringing, but also formed by experiences beyond the political boundaries of China. Study abroad provides them the opportunity to reflect on their awareness of the values and ways of life in China. When they integrate a new set of values into their own thinking, this may lead to a critical review of both sets of values and ways of thought. Effectively, the elements which make up an individual's national identity are brought under scrutiny (Byram, 1992). Thus, Chinese learners' study and living experiences in Britain contribute to the reconstruction of their Chinese national identities, which is indeed a site of struggle.

Social class identity

Like gender and nationality, social class is also linked to the second language learner's identity. The People's Republic of China is a socialistic country, where Marxist theory is included in the national curriculum of politics in secondary education and higher education. In Marxism, class is structured by ownership and organisation of production. There is a

clear division and inherent conflict between the capital-owning class and propertyless class. People's class consciousness and class identities are rooted in the economic structures of society, and are developed through collective action in their experiences of organisation and class struggle (Mackintosh and Mooney, 2004). Marx's ideas were a product of nineteenth century European and British society. Nowadays, a popular argument in both the social sciences and political debate is that the 'old' certainties of social class have been eroded: there has been a move from occupation to consumption patterns as sources of social distinction (Mackintosh and Mooney, 2004). Bourdieu (1986) sees occupational class and consumption influence social class identity in an interrelated way. Similarly, Connell *et al.* (1982, p. 33) state that 'it is not what people are, or even what they own, so much as what they do with their resources' is central to understand their class identities. This suggests that social class should not be considered only in terms of one's income and occupation, but in terms of one's cultural practices.

Since cultural practices are seen to be central to contemporary class identity formation, the cultural dimensions of class analysis provide the researcher a useful tool for exploring issues of social class in SLL field. Skeggs (2005) argues that culture can be converted into a highly mobile commodity, and has become a central site for the exchange of values, therefore, cultural practices are seen to be central to contemporary class formation, and how culture is deployed as an economic resource shapes our understanding of class. Social class is being increasingly defined as a cultural property of the person, in relation to their attitudes and practices. On the one hand, social class identities shape people's cultural values and lifestyle practices in everyday life; on the other hand, the context of people's

everyday lived experience constructs their social class identities, values and lifestyles (Devine, 2005). Social class identity is ‘produced in specific sets of social, historical and economic relations of power, which are reinforced and reproduced in everyday social encounters’ (Norton, 2000, p. 13). In other words, the relationship between individuals and social class is about a system of relationship between people, rather than a system of categories. Following the cultural turn, this present study focuses on the combination of having the resources and knowing how to use the resources to establish social class identity.

Language learner identity

I will use the term, ‘language learner identity’, to encompass Chinese learners’ various English learning experiences, their different English learning goals and their diverse orientation towards integrating into British society. These Chinese learners, whilst studying in the Chinese classroom context to meet the requirements of the Chinese National Curriculum, have traditionally been described as EFL learners. In the People’s Republic of China, since 2001, under the Chinese National Curriculum, students have to study English from the third year in primary school to the end of secondary school for ten years. This represents a lowering of the age of compulsory instruction from 11 to 9. Chinese learners learn English through the classroom in primary school, secondary school, university and further education, but they usually have no immediately local uses of English.

After arriving in the UK, Chinese learners are immersed in an English-speaking host culture and environment. They participate in an intensive formal English language learning

programme to prepare for their further education in various disciplines and future living in Britain. In the language classroom in Britain, the teacher is the only native speaker; the English language input is highly modified; and there is much controlled practice of forms. These classroom experiences may resemble those of a foreign language classroom, while the nature of English classes in China and in Britain varies immensely, not only with the purpose of the class, but also, with the age and level of the students concerned, and with the culture in which they are studying.

In the UK, outside the formal English learning situation, Chinese learners are involved in a natural English acquisition context. They travel on buses and trains, go shopping, watch TV, read newspapers and journals, talk to other students and make phone calls in English. There are ample opportunities for multiple interaction and practices. The extent to which they learn, the accuracy with which they use English, and the style and dialect they acquire depend on numerous variables, all of which have come to be associated with the field of ESL learning. It is necessary to note here that simply being in an English language environment does not guarantee that a learner will be exposed to richer input which may then allow them to learn English faster and more completely. Even in the contexts where 'ESL' clearly applies, there may be large differences in activities both inside and outside the classroom.

Thus, I argue that every Chinese learner has their own unique English learning experiences, and their aspirations, attitudes and motivation towards English language learning are also different from person to person. All these elements constitute Chinese students' multilayered language learners' identities. A Chinese learner in Britain can turn

out to be either an effective English language learner or a non-effective English language learner depending on how freely they are allowed to live in the British culture, and how much effort they have made to use English in an English-speaking context, alongside other factors.

The notion of second language learners' multiple identities provide me a useful platform to work with. I take the position that the Chinese learners' gender identities, national identities, social class identities and language learner identities are not a series of discrete background variables, but are all, in complex and interconnected ways, negotiated through their English language learning journeys in Britain.

2.3.3 Second language learners' agency

As I have discussed in the previous section, people's identities are to a great extent shaped by the historical and social context, but people as individual agents also play a role in shaping them (Hall, J. K. 2002). People have agency, and they are 'capable of critically analysing the discourses which frame their lives, and to claim or resist them according to the effects they wish to bring about' (Burr, 2003, p. 122). In this view, people are simultaneously constructed by discourse and use it for their own purposes; people have some choice in the ways they choose to create themselves. Although social constructionism is still unable to tell to what extent people are able to reconstruct themselves and society, there is an inextricable link between social construction and human agency.

From a sociocultural perspective, agency is not an inherent motivation of a particular

individual, but a socioculturally mediated capacity to act, which is located in the discursive spaces between individual users and the conditions of the moment (Hall, J. K., 2002, p. 36-37). It is agency that links motivation to action, and defines individual's choices. Agency is socially and historically constructed and is part of individual's habitus, which inclines people to act and react in specific ways (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001). Besides the social context, other agents are also involved in the development of individual's agency; the relations among agents can be either collaborative or conflictive. Hence agency is co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001).

With regard to the notion of human agency, second language learners should be treated more than 'processing devices that convert linguistic input into well-formed (or not so well-formed) outputs'; instead, they have to be understood as people, whose agency should be appreciated (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001, p. 145). As agents, second language learners 'actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their own learning' (p. 145); their actions are 'situated in particular contexts' and are influenced by their dynamic identities, which are subject to change over time (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001, p. 155). The view of second language learners as agents has four important implications on SLL: firstly, although there is always an unequal distribution of power in the institution and the host culture in which second language socialisation takes place, second language learners do not just passively accept and internalise the communicative norms and behaviour values poured down on them by the institutional or the host societal structures. Instead, with their own agency, when second language learners participate in new linguistic and social

practices, in which they both learn and contribute, they do not always assimilate into the host culture, and they sometimes resist and reframe their participation in socialising interaction (Shi, 2006). Subsequently, when second language learners act and react themselves in the host sociocultural contexts, they make agency choices, evaluate and contest the new sociocultural values and beliefs, struggle to broaden their individual agendas, and actively negotiate and re-establish their own language, ideologies and multiple identities; in their use of second language, they represent a particular identity at the same time as they construct it (Shi, 2006; Hall, J. K., 2002). In addition, second language learners should not be expected to learn and develop in precisely the same way even if the physical conditions of their learning appear similar, since different agency can lead learners to take quite different orientation towards their language ideologies, practices and transformations (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001; Shi, 2006). Finally, second language learners' motivation, goals and actions are dynamic and subject to change, which are always context situated, and influenced by their own histories and the attitudes of the people around learners; they may act upon their wishes only if their present environments allow for such agency (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001; Pavlenko, 2002a). All of these implications suggest that the attempt to standardise SLL theory and SLL pedagogy, which takes no account of the variety of learners and contexts for learning, is counter-productive.

Perspectives of second language learners' agency apparently provide me one way to explain the difference in the Chinese learners' investment in their English language learning and use, and in their adaptation to British academic system and British society in their English learning journeys in Britain.

2.4 Understanding second language learning as social practice

The arrival of sociolinguistic and sociocultural perspectives on the field of SLL provides me an alternative orientation to cognitive orientation towards understanding the SLL process. This present study is situated broadly following a recent social trend in the applied linguistics literature that views SLL as a collaborative affair, and that second language knowledge and skills are socially constructed through interaction (Mitchell and Myles, 2004). This section will draw variously from three theoretical approaches within this trend, namely, second language socialisation, communities of practice, and SLL and identity.

2.4.1 The social turn in second language learning

In recent years, there has been an increasing concern with the limitation of the traditional 'linguistics applied' approach, which involves overlaying linguistic forms on instances of language use and interpreting their meanings in light of the structural frameworks. This approach treats individual language users as stable, internally homogeneous, fixed entities in whose heads the universal and abstract language systems reside (Hall, J. K., 2002, p. 7). Applied linguistics began to loosen its ties to mainstream linguistics, and extend its reach to other disciplines, such as cultural psychology, linguistic anthropology, linguistic philosophy and social theory (Hall, J. K., 2002, p. 8). Particularly in the SLL field, provoked by Firth and Wanger's (1997) article, a special issue of *The Modern Language*

Journal devoting to a debate about making second language acquisition more sociolinguistically informed, was published in 1997. In this volume, Firth and Wagner's proposal of integrating the narrowly framed mechanistic second language acquisition into a broader sociolinguistically driven model was supported by Hall (1997), Liddicoat (1997), and Rampton (1997); while strongly criticised by Kasper (1997), Long (1997), and Poullisse (1997). Firth and Wagner (1997) criticise the field of SLL for its overwhelmingly cognitive orientation towards defining and researching the second language learners and SLL, and its overemphasis on the internalisation of mental process and 'the development of grammatical competence' (p. 288). They argue that meaning is 'not an individual phenomenon consisting of private thoughts executed and then transferred from brain to brain, but a social and negotiable product of interaction, transcending individual intentions and behaviours' (p. 290). A SLL field reformulated according to Firth and Wagner's (1997) argument would help us to question the field's division of language use from language learning, and gain more comprehension of 'how language is used as it is being acquired through interaction, and used resourcefully, contingently, and contextually' (p. 296). In the last decade, more empirical research studies have developed, in which sociolinguistic and sociocultural ideas are viewed much more central to the understanding of SLL. To date, it appears that there are at least two models in SLL: a cognitive model and a social model; while the distinction between a sociolinguistic approach and a sociocultural approach within a social model is rather confused. For example, the theory of language socialisation is introduced as a sociolinguistic approach by Mitchell and Myles (2004), but as a sociocultural approach by Watson-Gegeo and Nielsen (2003); the theory of communities of

practice and the theory of agency are identified as two sociolinguistic approaches by Mitchell and Myles (2004), but as sociocultural approaches by Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001). While the terms sociolinguistic approach or sociocultural approach serve as an umbrella for a variety of theoretical approaches adopted by different researchers, in this thesis, I will use the term, social model, in a broad way, and discuss the particular theories which are related to my study.

The social turn in SLL needs a new metaphor to symbolise the SLL process as a socialisation, or situated process of participating in a particular community of practice, which may entail the negotiation of ways of gaining membership of that community. The metaphor of acquisition in SLL is embedded in traditional 'linguistic applied' approach, which is criticised by Lantolf (1996) as being computationalism, informed by sociohistorical and social constructionist theories. Sfard (1998) observes that a new metaphor of participation has emerged in the recent education literature not as a replacement for, but as a complement to the traditional learning as acquisition metaphor. She has made a detailed distinction between the interpretation and application of these two metaphors. The acquisition metaphor, according to Sfard (1998), compels us to think of knowledge as a commodity that is accumulated by the learner and to construe the mind as the repository where the learner hoards the commodity. The participation metaphor, on the other hand, obliges us to think of learning 'as a process of becoming a member of a certain community', which entails 'the ability to communicate in the language of this community and act according to its particular norms' (p. 6). Moreover, while the acquisition metaphor is about states and the permanence implied by related terms such as 'having' and

‘knowledge’ (p. 5), the participation metaphor is characterized by terms such as ‘doing’, ‘knowing’ and ‘becoming part of a greater whole’ (p. 6). The acquisition metaphor implies somewhat discrete learning stages with a well-defined end point; while the participation metaphor ‘leaves no room for halting signals’ (p. 6).

Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) relate the discussion on acquisition and participation metaphors to SLL. The second language acquisition metaphor regards ‘language as a set of rules and facts to be acquired’ and permits the learner to discuss the complexity of language (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000, p. 155). The second language participation metaphor, however, shifts ‘the focus of investigation from language structure to language use in context, and to the issues of affiliation and belonging’ (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000, p. 156). To summarise, the second language acquisition metaphor focuses on ‘the individual mind’ and the internalisation of knowledge of language by looking at ‘what’ should be learnt; while the second language participation metaphor stresses ‘contextualization and engagement with others’ in its attempt to investigate ‘how’ learners learn a language. ‘Both metaphors have a role to play in explicating the processes entailed in learning a second...language’, and provide different perspectives for the researcher either to engage productively ‘in the study of learner languages’, or to explore ‘language socialisation’ (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000, p. 156). This present study considers the second language participation metaphor as more appropriate for understanding Chinese learners’ English learning experiences in Britain. From this perspective, I do not focus English language as input, but as a resource for participation in various kinds of activities the Chinese learners’ everyday lives in Britain comprise. Participation in these activities is

both the product and the process of English language learning.

2.4.2 Second language socialisation

In this section, I turn to a strand of the social model that is centrally concerned with language learning and development — language socialisation. Language socialisation is the practice by which children or newcomers to a community are socialised both to the language forms and, through the use of language, to adopt the values, behaviour and practices of that community (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986), and some would argue that the concept of language socialisation contributes most to understanding the cognitive, cultural, social and political complexity of language learning (Watson-Gegeo and Nielsen, 2003). The language socialisation tradition believes that language and culture are inseparable, and are acquired together, with each providing support for the development of the other (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p. 235). According to Ochs (1996, p. 407), the process of acquiring language and the process of acquiring ‘social and cultural competence’ facilitate each other, as language learners come to understand ‘social life’ through language forms, as well as come to understand language forms through their social experiences. Agar (1994) coined the term ‘languaculture’ to emphasise that language and culture are co-constructed and mutually contextualised.

Language socialisation rejects the notion that language learning can be understood or analysed in a decontextualized or even a context-reduced way. On the one hand, ‘there is no context-free language learning, and all communicative contexts involve social, cultural,

and political dimensions affecting which language forms are available or taught and how they are presented'; on the other hand, language learners also 'mark the social significance' of the language forms 'in various ways' (Watson-Gegeo and Nielsen, 2003, p. 157). The development of language and knowledge is constructed in and emerges through the learner's 'practice and interaction in specific historical, political, and sociocultural contexts', rather than solely happens inside the learner's individual head (Watson-Gegeo and Nielsen, 2003, p. 164).

A language socialisation perspective understands that 'the learning of language, cultural meanings, and social behaviour is experienced by the language learner as a single, continuous', but 'not linear process' (Watson-Gegeo and Nielsen, 2003, p. 164, citing Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo). Based on this notion, a clear distinction cannot be drawn between natural and formal classroom learning situations, between language learning and teaching processes, or between language learning and language use. In addition, longitudinal ethnographic studies conducted by Norton (2000) and Miller (2003) suggest that no amount of classroom instruction can replace spontaneous interaction in the second language. In the same way, this present study treats Chinese learners' English learning experiences in the classroom and outside the classroom in Britain as a coherent and inseparable process.

Influenced by a language socialisation perspective, there has been an increased interest in developing a more integrated perspective in SLL, viewed as 'both a cognitive and a social process' (Watson-Gegeo and Nielsen, 2003, p. 156). A key premise of this approach views the teaching and learning of the target language as socialising language learners not

only through its propositional content but also through its use. That is, second language learners are not only socialised into meaningful, appropriate and effective uses of target language, but also into culturally specific ways of thinking and knowing (Hall, J. K., 2002, p. 54). Viewing SLL as a process of socialisation provides new ways to frame the interaction between contexts and learning process, and points out the importance of considering how second language learners' access to linguistic and interactional resources is mediated by their multiple identities and their social status, and which discourses are taken by second language learners in relation to power and authority (Pavlenko, 2002a).

In the last decade or so, a language socialisation perspective has been applied to investigations of the ways in which both children and adult second language learners are socialised into the social practices of a community (see, for instance, Kanagy, 1999; Pallotti, 2001; Poole, 1992). Zuengler and Cole (2005) conducted a comprehensive review of language socialisation research in SLL. According to their observation, some studies portray socialisation as a smooth and successful process, while many other studies demonstrate language socialisation as 'a potentially problematic, tension producing, and unsuccessful process' (p. 306). For example, Atkinson (2003) found the school socialisation process could have negative effects on SLL. In Miller (2003) and Liang's (2006) studies, the Chinese immigrant students tended to speak Mandarin or Cantonese within the Chinese-speaking groups to associate with their Chinese-speaking peers, which had negative effects on their English language learning, and resulted in their relatively unsuccessful socialisation to mainstream classes. These studies demonstrate second language learners' diverse socialisations to various dimensions of discourse and social

organisation rather than a unify socialisation to the target language community. This present study will look at Chinese learners' discursive socialisation with native English speakers, overseas students of other nationalities and different Chinese speaking groups (see further discussion in Chapter Five). Like language socialisation, communities of practice, to which I now turn, underscores the historical and practical conditions of language learning.

2.4.3 Communities of practice

Another approach to language learning as a social practice is the concept of communities of practice, which has been adapted to study second language development amongst both children and adults (see, for instance, Toohey, 2001; Norton, 2001). This approach believes that second language learners do not simply receive, internalise, and construct linguistic knowledge in their minds, but enact it as persons in the world participating in the practices of a sociocultural community. This notion arose from Lave and Wenger (1991), who view learning as a socially situated process by which newcomers gradually move towards fuller participation in a given community's activities by interacting with more experienced community members — a process called 'legitimate peripheral participation'. Through this process, newcomers become increasingly experienced in the practices that characterise that community, and gradually move from the periphery of the community to its centre, eventually assuming roles as experts. It is important to note that 'legitimate peripheral participation' is never a matter of peaceful transmission and assimilation, but a conflicting

process of negotiation and transformation, because legitimate peripherality is always implicated in social structures involving power relations (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Learners do not simply position themselves in a community; rather, there is a dialectic struggle between learners and the community out of which emerges the learner's position and identity. Although having access to a wide range of resources is crucial for newcomers, the social structure of communities and the power relations can organise access in a way either to promote or prevent their legitimate peripheral participation, and define the learning possibilities available to the newcomers (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The newcomers frequently experience struggles and tensions in their centripetal movement towards becoming expert participants. Seen in this light, Chinese learners' socialisation into English speaking community is far more complicated than their unproblematically appropriating established English knowledge and skills. It is likely to involve struggles over access to English linguistic resources, conflicts and negotiations between different viewpoints arising from language teachers, institutions and the people they encounter in a range of contexts.

According to Wenger (1998, p. 100), peripherality and legitimacy are necessary to make newcomers' actual participation possible. By 'peripherality', he refers to the fact that some degree of non-participation can be an enabling factor of participation. This positive term indicates that individuals can belong to a community of practice in multiple ways, not just at the core or margin, and their positions within the community of practice can change over time. Considering 'legitimacy', Wenger (1998) states, that

In order to be on an inbound trajectory, newcomers must be granted enough legitimacy to be treated as potential members... Granting the newcomers legitimacy is important because they are likely to come short of what the community regards as competent engagement. Only with legitimacy can all their inevitable stumblings and violations become opportunities for learning rather than cause for dismissal, neglect, or exclusion.

(p. 101)

Thus, a certain level of legitimacy is essential for SLL. Without the legitimacy, second language learners cannot use the target language confidently in the target community. They will always feel they are 'illegitimate' users of the target language and as such, inferior to native speakers no matter how well they know the target language. In this thesis, I argue that different Chinese learners may be granted different degrees of legitimacy in relation to how they are perceived and categorised by language teachers and institutions due to the impact of the IELTS. Inappropriate categorisation of English language learners may limit their learning opportunities and their access to the variety of English, and may influence their confidence in learning English and using English, and thus may undermine their capacity to become fully participating members of their host community. This point will be further discussed with data in Chapter Seven.

2.4.4 Second language learning and the (re)construction of identity

Wenger (1998, p. 215) suggests 'because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity'. Learning is a process of becoming, or avoiding becoming a certain person, rather than a simple accumulation of knowledge and skills. When people learn a second language, they do so as individuals with their social histories.

Especially for adult second language learners, who have already formed a robust sense of 'identity' or 'self image' in their original cultures together with their habits of communication before they come into a new linguistic and sociocultural environment (Shi, 2006, p. 6). As people move across geographic, linguistic, social, cultural, and ideological boundaries, they will naturally go through intercultural secondary socialisation, in which they will experience cross-cultural transformations at different paces and with different intensities (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000; Pavlenko, 2001b). During the complicated transitional processes, second language learners' native languages and cultures are very likely to be transported across borders. Influenced by the ideologies and agency established in their primary socialisation, second language learners may find new ideologies and performance 'unacceptable or incompatible' (Pavlenko, 2001b, p. 319), and then choose to stick to their primary ones. In other circumstances, they may find the new ideologies and performance 'more favourable than those in their home cultures' (Shi, 2006, p. 7), and they may choose to acquire new ways of speaking and acting, and new ways of being.

Besides the relevance of social and cultural conditions, many current research studies in SLL have showed that language has played an important role in (re)constructing second language learners' identities through communication (Norton, 2000; Miller, 2003; Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004a; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). As Norton Peirce (1995, p. 13) writes, 'it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time'. In other words, people's identities are shaped by and through their language use. Burr (2003) also suggests that a person's identity is constructed out of the discourses culturally available to them, and which they draw upon in

their communication with other people. When people come together in a communicative event, who they are, who they think others are, and who others think they are, mediate in important ways their individual using and evaluating their linguistic actions (Hall, J. K., 2002, p. 34). Gee (1996) theorises that identity is enacted through a simultaneous interaction between social or cultural group memberships, a particular social language or mixture of them, and a particular context.

This subsection provides an understanding of how SLL and use are linked in social contexts to issues of (re)construction of identity. Within this theoretical framework, I will review research studies on gender, national and social class identities and SLL respectively.

2.5 Review of studies on gender identity and SLL

People engage in SLL with their shifting gender, national, social class and language learner identities, although their identities may not be consciously realised (Kubota, 2003). Analysis of widely available studies in SLL indicates that these categories of identities have not been given equal explicit attention. There are apparently few references to ‘language learner identity’, as this term is typically formed in this present study. Although gender, nationality, social class are constitutive elements essential to second language learners’ identities, the issues of gender have been explored to a greater extent than the other two categories.

The relationship between language and gender emerged as a separate field of enquiry in the 1970s (Pavlenko and Piller, 2001). Most of the studies conducted between 1975 and

the early 1990s presented 'men' and 'women' as undifferentiated and unitary groups, and the members of each group had more in common with each other than the members of the other group. This binary approach treats gender as a variable, often uses variationist and interactional sociolinguistics methodology, focuses on the differences between women's and men's language use, attempting to explain them through a generalised feature of gender relations: deficit, difference, or dominance (Norton and Pavlenko, 2004a; Pavlenko, 2001b). Particularly in the SLL field, large numbers of research studies have been conducted to investigate the gender difference in SLL ability (e.g. Ekstrand, 1980); in the 'four skills' of SLL (e.g. Nyikos, 1990; Ellis, 1994); in the motivation of SLL (e.g. Bacon and Finnemann, 1992; Clark and Trafford; 1995); in teachers' perceptions of the role of gender in SLL (e.g. Clark, 1998); in SLL styles and strategies (e.g. Young and Oxford, 1997; Goh and Foong, 1997); in second language classroom interaction (e.g. Pica *et al.*, 1991; Losey, 1995) in second language teaching materials (e.g. Pugsley, 1992); and in second language testing (e.g. Morris, 1998). Sunderland (2000) criticised the problematic nature of this binary approach for its underemphasising the differences within men and women's group, ignoring the importance of context and local meanings of gender, and failing to recognise that gender itself is shaped by language use (see also Pavlenko and Piller, 2001). Furthermore, the binary approach leaves no space for individual agency that allows men and women to choose linguistic forms and behaviour in particular social contexts, and to transform the normative categories often assigned to them (Kubota, 2003). Cameron (1992) strongly called for dismissing the traditional treatment of gender as a distinct category:

We must criticise explanations of difference that treat gender as something obvious, static and monolithic, ignoring the forces that shape it and the varied forms they take in different times and places. Such explanations are simplistic and pernicious, because whatever their intentions, then tend to end up just like non-feminist research, by giving an academic gloss to commonplace stereotypes and so reinforcing the *status quo*.

(p. 40)

Since the mid-1990s, several scholars in the SLL field have challenged essentialist assumptions underlying many earlier treatments of gender and SLL (Ehrlich, 1997; Norton, 2000; Sunderland, 2000; Pavlenko *et al.*, 2001). Influenced by critical, poststructuralist, and feminist theories, gender and language studies now acknowledge gender as more complex, since it interacts with other identities; and more specific, since its realisations and practices are far from universal (Sunderland, 2000). Gal (1991, p. 176) sees gender as ‘a system of culturally constructed relations of power, produced and reproduced in interaction between and among men and women’. This view of gender moves beyond static binary opposition to the study of how gender is produced in a variety of contexts. The nature of gender is clarified as a socially, locally and continuously constructed variable. It also has important implications for gender and SLL research: on the one hand, to study how gender as a system of social relations is constructed and negotiated in multiple discourses; on the other hand, to investigate how gender as a system of social relations influence individuals’ access to linguistic resources (Pavlenko, 2001c). The locus of gender and SLL study now shifts to considering gender as identity, which is both multiple and fluid; seeing gender and sexual identities as ‘performance’; the ongoing social and linguistic construction of gender; the gendered individual agency and contestation; the discursive gendered practices in

different discourses; and becoming gendered through ‘community of practice’ (Sunderland, 2000, p. 214). In view of the mass of literature on all these perspectives on gender and SLL research, it would be impossible to present here a detailed discussion of all the perspectives. Consequently, I have chosen to focus on the literature on gendered agency, gendered access, and gendered interaction in SLL respectively, which has a close link with further data analysis of this thesis (see Chapter Four).

2.5.1 Gendered agency and resistance

As mentioned before, a poststructuralist approach portrays second language learners as agents in charge of their own learning. When second language learners enter the target language community, they might find gender roles are viewed differently from their own cultures. In some cases, second language learners may decide to learn the second language only to a certain extent, which allows them to be proficient in the target language, but without the consequence of losing the old ways and adapting to the new ways of gendered being in the world. In other cases, their second language learning is accompanied by a full gendered transition to the new linguistic community, or they may resist the second language when they find the new gender identity options unappealing (Pavlenko and Piller, 2001). Moreover, second language learners’ agency is co-constructed, and their desires, gendered images of themselves are shaped by the social discourse (Norton and Pavlenko, 2004a). The gender discourse in the new linguistic community, therefore, has great potential to influence second language learners’ investment and decisions.

Several studies indicate that differences in gender relations between particular speech communities may motivate individuals — oftentimes women — to learn a second language, which may ensure them higher, more respectable social and economic status (see, for instance, Swigart, 1992; Holmes, 1993). In terms of the global spread of English language, some recent studies suggest that many young women around the world consider learning English as a way of empowerment. McMahon (1997) studied two feminist English classes in Japan. These adult Japanese women stated that English was more suitable to express their personal emotions, views, and newly acquired critical consciousness. Pavlenko's (2001b) study also shows that some immigrant and minority women learn English in order to escape gender relations and gendered linguistic practices of their cultures, which are perceived by them as hierarchical and demeaning. Kobayashi (2002) surveyed 555 high school students in Japan, and found that female Japanese students were significantly more positive towards learning English, training for English-language related professions, and travelling to English-speaking countries. For these young female Japanese students, English offered an entry into the job market as well as a possible way of liberating themselves from the confines of gender patriarchy. While these studies are remarkable in exploring the relationship between learners' gender agency and their English language learning, they only focus on female learners. In my study, I hope to demonstrate that not only the female Chinese learners', but also the male Chinese learners' gender agency influences their investment in English language learning in Britain.

2.5.2 Gendered access to linguistic resources

Although not all contexts in the target language community may be gendered, Pavlenko and Piller (2001, p. 24) argue that ‘gender as a system of social relations and discursive practices structures differential opportunities for access to linguistic resources’. Many studies suggest that in some minority and immigrant communities, a number of gatekeeping practices constrain women’s mobility and their access to second language classes, education and the workplace (Kouritzin, 2000; Norton, 2000; Goldstein, 2001; Heller, 2001). Norton (2000) has argued that linguistic-minority women can be denied access to contexts of communicative practice outside the language classroom, because men have privileged access to learning and using the second language. Even when classes, professional training, and other linguistic resources are available for immigrant and minority women, access problems may arise due to the minority community’s gatekeeping practices. Kouritzin (2000) insightfully points out that immigrant and minority women are troubled not only by gendered and systemic inequalities, but also by cultural conflicts. Their access to education in majority languages is significantly constrained by language and gender ideologies and practices of both majority and minority communities.

In the context of study abroad, access to and distribution of linguistic resources may be also at times gendered. When the categorises related to gender identity are imposed upon study abroad participants, their opportunities for language learning and using may be correspondingly restricted. Several studies conducted with Americans studying abroad suggest that some contexts in Japan, Spain, France or Russia also provide unequal opportunities for male and female learners to participate in informal interaction (Siegal,

1996; Talburt and Stewart, 1999; Kinginger, 2004; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). Talburt and Stewart (1999) discussed the manner in which an African-American woman studying in Spain was subjected to continuous and humiliating emphasis on race and sexuality in her interaction with Spanish men. This sexual harassment, whether real or perceived, provoked her negative interaction with Spanish speakers, and may have curtailed her future investment in learning Spanish. Polanyi (1995) connected the low speaking and listening gains on the Russian Oral Proficiency test of female American students to their experiences of sexual harassment by Russian men, which resulted in limitation on their opportunities for interchange. Similarly, the American women in Pellegrino Aveni's (2005) study conducted in Russia explicitly stated that they felt uncomfortable in male-female relationships in Russia, and they tried to avoid male Russian strangers due to insecurity about the men's motivation for interaction.

However, women are not always positioned as disadvantaged second language learners in study abroad contexts. Moon (2000) found that Asian women coming to the US as immigrants or international students had a greater chance to develop relationships with American men, and consequently, they had more opportunities to be engaged in meaningful interaction in English than their male peers. Even in the same social culture context, different female second language learners may handle with the unequal gender relations variously, which will result in different interaction opportunities. Kline (1993) reports that American women studying abroad in France sought refuge in literacy following repeated encounters with sexist and hostile attitudes in the broader French community, which brought negative impacts on their French oral development. On the

other hand, in Kinginger's (2004) study, Alice, an American female student on a study abroad trip in France, used her sexual attraction for French male encounters to create interaction opportunities. She described the strategy that she adopted to gain contact with French people by letting 'old, French men' buy her drinks (p. 233). In sum, both unequal gender relations in the target language community and second language learners' own gender ideologies and gender identities mediate their access to linguistic resources, and structure their interaction opportunities differently. This point will be further discussed with data in Section 4.4.

2.5.3 Gendered discursive interaction

Above I discussed how gender may mediate second language learners' access to interaction opportunities. This section is going to discuss gendered discursive interaction in various contexts from two approaches: investigating how second language learners' gender identities influence their discursive interaction, and how gendered subjectivities are reconstructed in second language communication situations. An excellent example of the first approach is a study conducted by Ohara (2001), in which the Western women refused to use gender-specific language forms in Japanese, which were perceived as 'too humble', 'too girlish', or 'silly'. These Western women's chose to resist certain aspects of Japanese language, because the unequal gender relationship represented by Japanese language, a symbolic capital, contradicted to their own gender ideologies.

The second approach concerns clashes in gender ideologies of second language

learners, and the transformation of second language learners' gender identities in the new linguistic community. Gender identity is not only constructed by discourse, but also accomplished in discourse (Pavlenko and Piller, 2001). A multisite ethnographic study by Gordon (2004) focused on immigrant Lao women and men in the US. This study investigated the interplay between gender identity shifts and second language socialisation. Transition to a new society with less rigid and more equal gender relationship resulted in a loss of social order in the Lao community, as Lao women in the US experienced increased opportunities for enacting their gender identities through expanded leadership roles and wage labour, and their access to American laws and cultural attitudes, while Lao men experienced a narrowing of opportunities because they had lost access to traditional sources of power. The author argues that SLL both influences and is influenced by these changing gender identities. Pavlenko (2001a) examined 30 SLL stories, including 25 cross-cultural autobiographies and 5 oral narratives, and found that these subjectivities came with new linguistic repertoires and discourses, which had to be mastered and internalised, often at the expense of their primary values and beliefs. Since the normative conceptions of femininity and masculinity might be different within different communities of practice, these subjectivities entailed new ways of being daughters, sons, wives, husbands, parents, lovers, and professional females and males.

These studies provide some insights for my study, because they investigate the relationship between second language learners' gender identities and their discursive interaction. I will demonstrate in Section 4.5 that the Chinese learners' interaction in the language classroom are structured to a large extent by their identities as women or men,

and in Section 4.6 that Chinese learners' gender identities are negotiated through their discursive interaction in British society.

To sum up Section 2.5, influenced by social constructionism and poststructuralism, recent studies on gender identity and SLL contrast with a male/female dichotomy in relation to various issues in SLL learning and second language use, while focusing on individual agency that allow women and men to choose linguistic forms and behaviour in particular social contexts, and possible transformation of normative gender ideologies assigned to women or men by their original communities (Kubota, 2003). The ways women and men learn and use a second language 'are not determined by their gender but constructed, negotiated, and transformed through social practices informed by particular social settings, relations of power, and discourses' (Kubota, 2003, p. 37). This conclusion is integral to my analysis in Chapter Four.

2.6 Review of studies on national identity, social class identity and SLL

Many research studies conducted in identity and SLL area focus on immigrant and/or minority learners, and ethnic identity rather than national identity is usually addressed as an important aspect of identity, which mediates second language learners' learning experiences (see, for instance, Norton, 2000; Heller, 2001; Pavlenko, 2001a; Miller, 2003). Ethnic identity focuses more on common descent and a shared cultural heritage because of common descent, while national identity focuses on political borders and autonomy, which are justified by arguments centred on shared cultural heritage (Joseph, 2004). Only a few

study abroad projects look at the negotiation of second language learners' national identities during their journeys. Kinginger (in press), for example, studied 23 American undergraduate students, who participated in various one-semester programmes in France. These American students found that aspects of their national identity were regularly challenged in unanticipated ways, both in interaction with their host families and with peers. One of these students, Beatriec, reacting to the challenges with defensiveness, finally estranged herself from her host family, and lost the only reliable context for her informal French language development in Paris. As this present study is set up in a study abroad context, the display of the Chinese learners' national identities appear more vivid in the data compared to the display of their ethnic identities.

Similarly, there is limited attention to evidence that social class identity also plays an important role in SLL dynamics (Collins, 2006). Collins argues that the lack of reference to social class in SLL literature does not mean that class processes are absent from these studies, instead, they are omnipresent, but referred as 'power relations' or 'transformative practices' indirectly (p. 4). After striking review of SLL publications, I found only a few studies which mentioned social class directly. Even when SLL scholars discuss social class, they pay unbalanced attention to second language learners: firstly, they generally focus on the students from lower social classes rather than students from middle classes and upper classes; secondly, they generally interest in the minority and/or immigrant students instead of students studying abroad (see, for instance, Heller, 2001; Goldstein, 2001). Therefore, only the needs of underprivileged students have been documented and addressed. This present study focuses a group of Chinese learners I would label as privileged, and tries to

discover the affluent and secure second language learners' needs.

Furthermore, most of these studies treat social class as a fixed position within a social structure and a social variable, which determines the learning and use of a second language. For example, Willett's (1995) study shows how the micro-politics of gender and class worked to position a Mexican-American young boy, Xavier, as a problematic learner in a mainstream classroom. Xavier's working-class family background contrasted sharply with most other children's middle-class family backgrounds in the school. Therefore, his ESL teacher and bilingual aide did not assume that he had support at home, or he would develop English normally, as they had assumed about other children. In Goldstein's (2001) study, 25 out of 26 Portuguese immigrant women could not access formal ESL instruction because of the gendered structure and dynamics of the Portuguese family, and the class positions they held within the Canadian political economy.

From a poststructuralist perspective, Kubota (2003) suggests that social class should not be treated as a fixed category, as class gets constructed by social practices and discourses, and people with certain socioeconomic status get positioned or position themselves in learning and using a second language. Collins (2006) also argues that social class, as a feature of identity, is a sense of self in relation to others, and thus should be explored as a process with ethnographic orientation. Within this thread, Heller (2001), for example, conducted an ethnographic study in a single French-language minority high school in the Toronto area. She found that the reproduction of gender and social class ideologies in the bilingual school, which relegated females, gays and lesbians, and working-class students to the margins of public spaces, ensured the reproduction of

heterosexual, middle-class male control over the definition of ideologies of ethnicity and language. Thus the students would become imbued with ideologies of heterosexual middle-class masculinity. Applying this poststructuralist approach, this study treats social class as a shifting identity, and SLL as part of the process of social class identity construction. The discussion of social class, therefore, focuses on the Chinese learners' lived experiences on social class, on how their social class identities shape the constraints they encounter and the opportunities they enjoy as well as how they, as active agents, shape their own lives in terms of their cultural values and lifestyle practices during their English language learning journeys in Britain.

Poststructuralism provides a general conceptual framework that can be useful in exploring issues of national identity, social class identity and SLL. Like gender identity, national identity and social class identity cannot be regarded as a series of discrete background variables; instead, they need to be studied as socially and culturally constructed, as dynamic and subject to change, and as always context dependent. Thus, there are no SLL behaviour, practices or styles that can be universally associated with a particular national group or a particular social class group. Moreover, second language learners' national identities and social class identities are reinforced, challenged, or (re)produced during their SLL processes.

2.7 Summary

The theoretical framing I have undertaken in this chapter addresses the social nature of

SLL from three perspectives: first, a second language is viewed as a tool and resource for social action (Hall, J. K., 2002); second, second language learners are conceived as agents, whose actions are situated in particular contexts, and are influenced by their various social needs and their dynamic gender, national, social class and language learner identities; third, SLL is regarded as a process of being socialised into the communicative and other social activities of the target language community (Hall, J. K., 2002). In this view, SLL does not only occur in language classroom, but also happens in second language learners' daily lives. Second language development is shaped by second language learners' experiences in the target language environments, including 'the relationship' they 'develop with more expert' target language users, and the particular interaction 'opportunities provided to and created by second language learners (Hall, J. K., 2002, p. 66).

Through the lens of poststructuralist theory, one can see the highly context-sensitive nature of discursive SLL practices and unpredictable SLL outcome. Second language learners' dynamic and constantly changing identities mediate their access to linguistic resources and interaction opportunities available in the second language, and their identities are also shaped during SLL processes. While separating the identities into four categories — gender, national, social class, and language learner's identities — for purposes of clarity and better focus, I would like to emphasise that each aspect of identity may interact with others in complex ways, and therefore, it is often difficult to determine the extent to which identity alone impacts on interaction and participation in SLL. Among the four categories of identities, gender identity seems to have been explored more extensively than the other three. Acknowledging national, social class and language learner

identities also appear to be highly relevant to SLL, this present study attempts to address the balance, and thus explores the relationship between gender, national, social class and language learner identities and SLL integrally and critically in a study abroad context.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter now moves to a discussion of the research methodology that this present study employed. Although many social identity researchers consider social identity to be dynamic, most of the studies conducted by social psychologists were confined to questionnaires and surveys, which do not allow for dynamism, as they are typically onetime occurrences (see, for instance, Giles and Johnson, 1987; Lee, 1993). In the second language learning (SLL) field, researchers have used interviews, observation, and case studies in their work on language and identity. Goldstein (1995) interviewed and observed Portuguese line workers in both English and Portuguese with the help of a research assistant who was fluent in both language. Norton (2000) employed in-depth interviews and diary study in her longitudinal study of five immigrant women in Canada. Miller (2003) conducted a case study with 10 migrant adolescent students in Australia for 18 months. Kinginger (2004) carried out a life-story interview with a working class American woman, who chose to study French as a means of attaining social capital and social freedom, typically unavailable to someone from a lower class background. No matter how detailed and carefully undertaken, onetime research cannot be adequate to study identity, since onetime research yields only one view of a complex phenomenon. In consideration of the complex and contradictory nature of identity, it should be studied with a methodology that is dynamic both in philosophy and in practice, and explored on a continuum that allows factors such as language, gender, nationality, social class, appearance, and personality to interplay in a complex fashion without beginnings and ends.

In investigating the relationship between identity and language learning, the research questions I have asked, I can infer a methodology, which has four critical characteristics or criteria. Firstly, it will look at the complex relationship between social structure and human agency without resorting to deterministic or reductive analysis. Secondly, it must reveal how individuals make sense of their own experiences from a historical perspective. Thirdly, it must incorporate ‘an emic perspective, the voice and subjectivities of both the participant and the researcher present in the writing’ (Miller, 2003, p. 16). Finally, it must allow for ongoing flexibility in the data collection and analysis, drawing on whatever fields of research methods, which prove productive for the project (Nelson, *et al.*, 1992). Ethnography and case study tend to have the potential to satisfy all four features mentioned, and can also accommodate a focus on issues of SLL and identity.

In this chapter, I will firstly discuss the interpretive nature of qualitative study, the researcher and the researched and the researched as multicultural subjects, the paradigm and research strategies that influence my study, and then turn to a detailed description of the study itself, followed by the methods of analysing empirical data and the biography of the six primary participants.

3.1 Qualitative research as a site of multiple interpretive practices

In the previous chapter, I have argued that identity and SLL cannot be viewed in isolation from social and cultural contexts. There is no obvious linear relationship between Chinese learners’ identities and their English learning and living experiences in Britain. The

complexity of this relationship needs to be studied by qualitative research in terms of its interpretive nature. Qualitative research, as a set of interpretive activities, embraces many separate disciplines, together with their methods, and the forms of their findings and interpretations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). The interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary nature of qualitative research allows the researcher to bring the research method and meaning from one discipline to another, and use research strategies in multiple ways. The separate and multiple uses and meanings of the methods of qualitative research make it difficult for researchers to agree on any essential definition of qualitative research. The central image for qualitative research is the crystal, which can reflect externalities and refract within itself, create different colours, patterns, and arrays, and cast off in different directions (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). In the crystallisation process, the researcher tells the same tale from different points of view, and there is no 'correct' point of view. Each of them, 'like light hitting a crystal', reflects a different perspective on this tale (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 8). 'Readers and audiences are then invited to explore competing visions of the context, to become immersed in and emerge with new realities', and to achieve their comprehensions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 8).

Qualitative research aims more to depict the complexities of lived experiences than to offer generalisable narrative or to predict others' experiences (Talbert and Stewart, 1999, p. 165). It usually commits 'some version of the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its research subject', and stresses 'the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 13). The process of developing a qualitative

research study can be divided into five phases: researcher reflexivity, 'major paradigms and interpretive perspectives, research strategies, methods of collecting and analysing empirical data', and the politics and practices of interpretation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 30). I take up these five phases in order, and will then discuss them in relation to my study more fully in the following sections.

3.2 Researcher reflexivity

Behind all the qualitative research phases stands the biographically situated researcher, whose gender, class, ethnic, national, cultural identity and personal history influence the whole research process. There is no value-free research, since researchers cannot escape from the social world that they are researching. Researchers bring their own biographies to the research context, and research participants behave in particular ways in researchers' presence (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). This does not mean that the researcher indulges in self-absorbed hyper-reflexivity and outpourings of autobiographical revelation. Simply briefly inserting autobiographical or personal information often serves to establish and assert the researcher's authority, but flooding in the text with the researcher's subjective ruminations has the potential to silence the research participant (Fine, *et al.*, 2003). A qualitative researcher should acknowledge and disclose their own selves in the research, seek to understand their part in, and influence on, the research; instead of trying to eliminate researcher effects, which is also impossible (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). Thus, there remains a fundamental place in the qualitative research process for researcher reflexivity.

The research procedure of the present study, with all it entails, is related to who I am, and my life experiences. I was born in China and had spent twenty-three years in China before I came to further my study in Britain. Like these young Chinese students in my study, I am an English learner and user; I am struggling to find my place in a British institution, and my position in the British society. They and I are apprenticed to a foreign discourse with its own linguistic and cultural grammar, although we engage in the apprenticeship at different levels. As I teased out issues of identity for these students from the data, I was also engaged in the development of my own identity, as a female Chinese student from a middle-class family struggling in a British milieu. My ideologies and behaviour of being a woman, Chinese and an English learner/user were also negotiated and reconstructed in the research procedure. In what follows, I take a particular 'spin' on the relationship between the researcher and the researched, as a further notion of reflexivity.

3.3 The researcher and the researched

The relationship between the researcher and the researched has become a topic of increasing interest and concern in the social science. Qualitative researchers have two-layered beliefs: first, it is assumed that qualified, competent researchers can report their observation of the social world objectively, clearly and precisely; second, the research participant is present in the world, and should be able to report their experiences in some form (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Poststructuralists suggest that there is no objective observation, but only socially situated observation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Thus, both

the researcher and the researched take part in the research, and the research process is co-constructed by them. Social constructionists also suggest that ‘the validity of the participants’ accounts must be acknowledged’, since their experiences ‘can no longer be given an alternative interpretation by the researcher who then offers their accounts as truth’ and privilege (Burr, 2003, p. 155).

The researcher approaches participants with his or her own research goals, assumptions, and procedures. My perspective and background affected how I spoke to and was heard by the students and teachers. This often meant modifying my own discourse to facilitate comprehension and interaction. Besides being a researcher, a sense of other identities that I have claimed or had attributed to me was clear to me at different times in relation to the participants. The focal students and I shared a similar background. In many ways, I was an insider to them: we all spoke Chinese, and were studying in Britain as international students. This helped me to better understand their needs and perspectives, develop rapport, and create opportunities for reciprocity as well as for highly interactive and dialogic research. At the same time, we occupied slightly different social (e.g., social class) and institutional positions (e.g., language schools students versus PhD student), which also shaped our relationships. The relationship between my participants and me is not as simple as the relationship between the researched and the researcher. I was not merely recording and analysing the language output of the students, but engaging them as joint participants in discursive work, in which my own voice was also present. We not only met each other in the classroom, but also in various casual contexts, such as the high street, supermarkets, coffee shops, my house or their houses. We shopped together, had dinner

together, and called each other. They treated me as a friend, supporter and researcher, while I regarded them as my participants more than my friends. On many occasions, I had to persuade myself that they were my participants and not my friends; otherwise, I would lose my motivation to communicate with them. Different ages, personalities, and ideologies were hindrances to prevent the development of natural friendship. Tolerance became the essential character that I had to display when I was playing the role of 'the researcher'. Similarly, the participants might also show or emphasise some characteristics they would not show or emphasise in other occasions when they were playing the role of 'the researched'.

The researched also has their own agendas, which they wanted to address in the research process. I may variously have been understood as a Chinese student studying in Britain, sympathetic listener, supporter, friend, and advisor. In many cases, my role was perceived differently by different participants. During this present study, both the researcher and the researched are not objects; the researcher is working *with*, rather than working *on* the researched. 'With', according to Cameron *et al.* (1992, p. 22), implies 'the use of interactive or dialogic research methods, as opposed to the distancing or objectifying strategies positivists are constrained to use'. Although I conducted unobtrusive observation in the classroom, I participated in the research context not as a pure researcher. The multi-roles I actually presented were not planned, and then imposed on the participants, but was subject to interpretation by the participants. This co-constructed relationship between the researcher and the researched offers different opportunities for interaction on the findings of the research, acknowledging that divergent interpretations by the researcher and the

researched may rise.

3.4 Constructivism as an interpretive paradigm

All qualitative research is interpretive, and guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied, including such theoretic frameworks as positivism and postpositivism, constructivism, critical theory and Marxist models, and feminist-poststructural (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Randor, 2001). In investigating the relationship between Chinese learners' identities and their English language learning journeys in Britain, the questions I have asked, the data I have considered relevant and the conclusions I have drawn have been informed by a constructivist paradigm, which assumes

a relative ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent cocreate understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures. Findings are usually presented in terms of the criteria of grounded theory or pattern theories.

(Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 35)

In terms of the features of constructivist paradigm outlined above, it seems that Denzin and Lincon (2003) tend to use 'constructivism' to refer to theoretical approaches that address multiple versions of the reality and subjective interpretation. These two points were also described as the characteristics of social constructionism by Burr (2003). I am aware that there are some differences between constructivism and social constructionism. For example, according to Burr (2003, p. 20), constructivism is distinguishable from social

constructionism with regard to ‘the extent to which the individual is seen as an agent who is in control of this construction process, and in the extent to which our constructions are the product of social forces, either structural or interactional’. However, given the shared fundamental assumptions — ‘the human construction of what we take to be the “real”’ (Gergen, 1999, p. 236) — between constructivism and social constructionism, in this thesis, I will try to bring them together in understanding the relative nature of reality and the subjective nature of enquiry.

Although the tenets of social constructionist theory appear to lead automatically to a relativist position instead of a realist position, in fact, there are many overlaps between the subtle variations of relativism and realism. Most relativists do not deny the possibility of a real world existing independently of our descriptions of it, and most realists also acknowledge the power of language to construct the world in some respects (Burr, 2003). In this present study, I adopt a synthesis of realist and relativist proposals: (1) people’s perceptions are co-constructed by both the nature of material reality and the constructive force of language; material conditions generate, but do not determine the reality, social constructions which in their turn ground actions and decisions also have real consequences (Nightingale and Cromby, 2002); (2) reality is therefore not a constant, but an ever-changing realm that is discursively and practically constructed by people, while this construction is limited by material and social conditions (Burkitt, 1999). In arguing that people do not find or discover reality and knowledge so much as they construct or make it, social constructionist researchers always address the processes of interaction among individuals, and the interaction between individuals and social contexts in which they live

and work. Accordingly, I consider the reality of Chinese learners' identities and their English language learning experiences in Britain may be inseparable from the discourse about them; my research accounts are locally and historically specific; and my research findings are provisional and contestable.

Social constructionism also regards 'objectivity as impossibility' (Burr, 2003, p. 152). Firstly, 'no human being can step outside of their humanity and view the world from no position at all'. The questions that a researcher asks about the world, their 'theories' and their 'hypothesis' always arise from 'the assumptions that are embedded in' their perspectives of the world. Secondly, facts themselves are partial, since 'they are always the product of someone asking a particular question', which derive from the person's 'assumptions about the world' (Burr, 2003, p. 152). Thus the researcher always brings their particular subjective background to their research projects. I consider myself as principle 'research instrument' (Duff, 2008, p. 55) in the present study: selecting research participants, selecting research sites, conducting interviews and observation, filtering them through my own views, values and perspectives, analysing data, and imposing interpretations on the findings. Similarly, the research participants also develop their subjective meanings of their experiences, which are varied, multiple, and negotiated socially and historically, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views (Creswell, 2007).

Being subjective does not necessarily mean being biased or unreliable. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006, p. 79) find out that 'most qualitative paradigms agree on the importance of the subjective meanings individuals bring to the research process and acknowledge the

importance of the social construction of reality'. Therefore, most qualitative researchers, especially constructivist researchers do not regard subjectivity as deficient. Peshkin (1988) suggests the virtue of subjectivity is in how it can meaningfully shape rather than distort research accounts, and it resides in the conscious realisation and declaration of the reasoning and evidence that influences the selected focus and crafted features of a research account. Since it is unavoidable to present one's subjectivity in the research, the researcher has the responsibility to make their subjectivities transparent to the audience and the reader. The researcher needs to make an interpretation of what they find, an interpretation shaped by their own experiences and backgrounds, because they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences (Creswell, 2007). This is why I have discussed the relationship between the researcher and the researched as a separate section above.

Encompassing a relative ontology and a subjectivist epistemology, social constructionist research 'is not about identifying objective facts or making truth claims', therefore, the normal understanding of 'the concepts of reliability and validity' do not apply to social constructionist work (Burr, 2003, p. 158). Social constructionist researchers have to find another way to legitimate their analyses and justify the quality of their research. Among a number of criteria that have been proposed to justify the analysis of constructivist research, I apply three criteria to enhance the coherence and rigour of this present study: first, the systematic analysis of data hopefully providing a soundly argued interpretation; second, an in-depth rationale in steps in the analytic procedure, which will enable the reader to make a judgement about its adequacy (Taylor, 2001); third, openness

to findings that contradict my own assumptions, and the inclusion of revisions and exclusions (Yin, 2003).

3. 5 Ethnography as a naturalistic research strategy

Poststructuralist approaches to SLL favour longitudinal ethnographic studies that allow the researcher to examine both the learner language itself and the social contexts of its learning and use (Pavlenko, 2002a). Ethnography, as a research strategy of qualitative and naturalistic approaches, is ideally suited for studying small-scale cultures, and ethnographers have been known to go to great lengths in exploring the group they have chosen to study (Wolcott, 1999). The following features of ethnography made me adopt this research strategy in the present study: a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena; a tendency to work primarily with ‘unstructured’ data; investigation of a small number of cases in detail for a long period; and analysis of data that involves explicit verbal description and interpretation of the meaning and functions of human actions, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998, p. 110-111).

In contrast to traditional decontextualised research approaches, such as experiment study and social survey, ethnography provides a new way to study individuals as historically and socially situated entities engaged in constructing their own realities through interaction with others in the social, political and cultural environments where they involve (LeCompte, 2002). In the SLL area, ethnography has facilitated a shift in the locus

of SLL from an isolated act taking place in formal classroom to daily learning in various informal settings, apprenticeships, and informal activities (see, for instance, McKay and Wong, 1996; Norton, 2000; Miller, 2003; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). This present study locates Chinese students within their local English language learning contexts, which represents a significant shift of focus in second language research, from the general to the specific, and from the universal to the local. Ethnography encompasses careful attention to context, and stresses that individuals move between and across contexts. Moreover, Wolcott (1999) suggests that there is no way we can totally capture the life way of another person or group of people, any more than we could ever satisfactorily convey to another all that constitutes our own persona. When a researcher conducts an ethnographic study, they seek a context that will allow them to study a system of action or a form of activity in great depth. It is normal for the researcher to discover that the research context proves to be more disparate than anticipated, since contexts are constituted by different social factors, which influence a research context in unexpected and different ways (Baszanger and Dodier, 2004; Roberts and Sanders, 2005). Thus, the researcher should be ready to confront the various social factors that affect the research practice, and to take into consideration the way in which they are related to the research context and the researched forms of action. And in my research process, I was always flexible to change my original research designs to fit real research situations. For example, when I found not many Chinese learners studied the long-term General English Language Programme in the language school as I expected, I decided to work with four Chinese learners who took the 36-week International Business Foundation Programme in a language school.

Furthermore, ethnography provides a way to explore ‘the unique culture of discrete individuals’ (LeCompte, 2002, p. 292). Through using narrative enquiry, which includes ‘life-history interviews’ and ‘the stories of key research participants’, ethnographers can demonstrate ‘how individuals are constrained by cultural norms’, and how they develop in accordance with their own identities and ‘characteristics’, which they carry ‘within the culture’ (LeCompte, 2002, p. 292). In this way, ethnography embeds ‘individuals within a cultural framework without losing their unique and separate qualities or reducing them to a collection of abstract traits’ (LeCompte, 2002, p. 292). In addition, Tedlock (2003) indicates that narrative ethnography makes it possible to include both the accurate portrayal of the research participant’s and the researcher’s own experiences. The narrative dimension of ethnography is built on recording a sequence of encounters between the ethnographer and the research participant within individual stories. In this sequence, both the ethnographer and the research participant involve in the process of the construction of self, and they are caught up in the same tangled web of stories in the context (Baszanger and Dodier, 2004).

Ethnographers may be found anywhere, studying anything that can be studied through a fieldwork approach. ‘Doing ethnography’, for many qualitatively oriented researchers, has become a shorthand expression for describing how they intend to gather data, without necessarily suggesting or implying, and certainly without promising, that the outcome of their efforts will be framed as ethnography. However, Agar (1996) insists ethnography is much more complicated than collecting data, but pursuing research through a fieldwork approach is a logical starting place for realising ethnographic potential. Ethnography in this

present study is treated more than a method, but the mind work that goes with fieldwork to accomplish ethnography. Ethnography entails both the way I research my project, and the interpretive framework that I impose on everything I study. I do not set out a context to observe, but I take responsibility for making whatever I observe explicit, because that is how I make sense of what I see. It has become a personal way of seeing. I approached my project with an open mind, but not an empty mind, because as a researcher, I was informed at both substantive and subconscious stages by tacit and explicit sociology, linguistic and research theories. As Clifford and Marcus (1986, p. 115) notes, ‘whatever else an ethnography does, it translates experience into text’, and experience is always idiosyncratic.

Besides the strength of ethnographic approach, I am addressing three problems of this approach, which might affect the reliability and validity of this present study: (1) the presence of the researcher alters the situation as the participants may wish to avoid or impress the researcher; (2) the researcher tends to trust the participants, whose definition of the situation may be selective, partial or false; (3) the researcher may identify too closely with the participants, and neglect some aspects (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007).

3.6 Case study as the main strategy of enquiry

I selected case study as the main strategy of enquiry, because it allowed me to locate the Chinese learners within their varied sites of activity and participation, and to understand how the Chinese learners constructed, and were constructed by, English language learning and use within these sites of representation. Although case study, as a research strategy, is

defined by interest in individual cases, rather than by the methods of enquiry used (Stake, 2003), it still carries particular implications on social science research: case study investigates a few cases, or just one case, in considerable depth; it aims to capture the uniqueness of the case, rather than using the case as a basis for wider scientific generalisation; it frequently adopts a narrative approach rather than a framed approach; it usually, but not always, collects unstructured data, and analyses the data in a qualitative way; and it describes the data in a complex and holistic way, which involves many related variables (Hammersley and Gomm, 2000; Stake, 2000). The case study is suitable to answer 'how' and 'why' research questions, especially when the research has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, because these questions need to be studied in depth and over time (Yin, 2003). Case study research has an interest in the process on how variables impact the event at different points in time, therefore narrative accounts of events in particular cases are essential to understand the outcome, which can always be reached by multiple pathways (Becker, 2000). In order to understand the complex, holistic and meaningful characteristics of Chinese learners' English learning experiences in Britain, I studied a small number of cases jointly. In respect of multiple realities, I was careful to find the stories that best represent the cases, as well as let the cases tell their own stories.

Authenticity is another advantage that one can expect from case study. Case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations rather than in artificially created settings, and a chronological narrative of events relevant to the case (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Accordingly, case study enables me to gain a holistic view of the Chinese learners' English

language learning experiences in context and take important personal, social, and cultural phenomena into account. Case study considers phenomenon and context are not always distinguishable in real-life situations, and the context might be highly pertinent to the researched phenomenon (Yin, 2003). As a means of tracking variability across sites, cases provide a way into the profoundly local embedded worlds of participants, and allow for the fact that these worlds may vary considerably. It enables me to portray ‘what is like to be’ in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and thick description of Chinese learners’ lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings of, their English language journeys in Britain.

The great strength of case study is that it provides a full variety of evidence, including observation, interviews, documents and artefacts, to inform ‘full and thorough knowledge of the particular’ (Stake, 2000, p. 22). The unique feature of the case study makes it difficult for the researcher himself/herself to draw conclusions about some general type of phenomenon or about members of a wider population of cases (Hammersley and Gomm, 2000). In this case, Stake (2000) proposes a new term, ‘naturalistic generalisation’, to suggest that case study need not make any claims about the generalisation of its findings itself, while letting others recognise the similarities of objects and issues in and out of context with the awareness of the natural covariations of happenings. In order to guarantee the conclusions will be possible to transfer from one setting to another on the basis of ‘fit’, the researcher has to provide proper thick description of the case(s) they study (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Accordingly, I will introduce the unique family backgrounds, characters, and related life experiences of the six Chinese students, who participated in my case study,

in a detailed way in Section 3.14, so that the reader can relate the findings of this present study to his or her own research study or working environment.

My decision to use a case study approach is a strategic decision in terms of the benefits of case study research described above. At the same time, I notice that two weak features of case study research may affect the rigour of this present study: firstly, informed by constructivist paradigm, I do not see subjectivity as a failure needing to be eliminated, but a case study may be negatively influenced by the researcher's subjective misunderstanding or biases (Duff, 2008); secondly, the uniqueness of cases makes it difficult generalising findings except where other readers can see their applications (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007), despite attempts made to address transferability.

3.7 The value of narrative approach

Considering the important role that narrative has played in both ethnography and case study research strategies, it is worthy discussing the value of narrative approach in a separate section. Several recent critiques of SLL research have referred to a tendency to treat variability in SLL as secondary to its universal characteristics (see, for instance, Pennycook, 1990; Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001; Norton and Toohey, 2001; Block, 2003). From a variety of theoretical perspectives, more qualitative research has been directed at the holistic description of SLL experiences and has emphasised on the social, affective and conceptual dimensions of the learning process.

Narrative, which allows people to give their lives meaning across time, has become a

focus of research and a rich source of data (Pavlenko, 2002b). According to Lieblich *et al.* (1998), narrative research refers to any study that uses or analyses narrative materials, which includes life stories provided in interview or literary work, and the researcher's field notes writing in a narrative manner. In this study, I not only studied researched narrative objects (e.g. participant's diaries), but also used narrative as a means to study the research questions (e.g. narrative interview).

Narrative enquiry encourages the researcher to turn from trying to explain the relationship between identity and SLL by weaving it into grand textures of cause and effect to trying to explain it by placing it in complex local contexts. The researcher, therefore, has to handle a set of largely uncharted difficulties instead of a set of well-charted ones during the investigation process. Furthermore, Narrative enquiry provides the researcher a chance to see 'what a first-person account of the physical world would look like in the first place', and it also offers 'a much richer source' of individuals' life experiences than do 'third-person distal observation' (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000, p. 157). 'The cohesive glue that imbues the narrative with significance is the plot which gives meaning to the events of the narrative and which in turn allows people to make sense of their own actions and those of others' (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000, p. 160, citing Polkinghorne). Through narrative, I come in contact with my participants as people engaged in the process of interpreting themselves. I work then with what is said and what is not said, within the context in which life is lived and the context of the interview in which words are spoken to represent that life.

Narrative has great significance in studying identity: it provides the researcher with

access to people's identity, because the stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality reveal the inner world of individuals (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998). Schiffrin (1996) also suggests that the form of stories, the content of stories, and the story-telling behaviour all indicate narrators' personal selves, and their social and cultural identities. Moreover, narrative approach helps the researcher to understand people's experiences, and it allows the researcher to get information that people do not consciously know themselves (Bell, 2002). In this present study, all of my research participants could not describe their identities directly, because the term, 'identity', is too academic for them. However, my efforts to elicit their life stories through other means allowed me to discover the links between their multiple identities, their own histories and their daily practices during their English learning journeys in Britain.

3.8 The project and methods of data collection

As I embarked on my study, I immediately faced three challenges. First, I wanted to work with participants over an extended period, so that I could examine to what extent their English language learning and living experiences in Britain changed their identities; second, I needed a methodology adequate to the task of exploring the complex relationship between identity and language learning and language using; third, I hoped to work with participants who had come from Mainland China, and had not fully settled down in Britain, since this newly arrived stage places the greatest demands on the students to learn the second language and cultural practices of the new society. The way I approached my

research project and addressed these challenges are described in the form of a chronology that spans a period of thirteen months. An overview of the multiple data sources is given below, and the detailed description of the phases of data generation follows:

Data Sources	Duration of Data Collection	Quantity of Data
Narrative interviews with 9 Chinese students	June-August 2005	14 hours
Classroom observation in 3 language schools	May-June 2005 (pilot study)	21 hours
	October 2005-May 2006 (main study)	117 hours
Observation outside the classroom	October 2005-May 2006	35 hours
Talks with students	October 2005-May 2006	41 hours
Phone conversations with students	October 2005-May 2006	16 hours
Email conversations with students	October 2005-May 2006	10 emails
Student's diaries	October 2005-May 2006	126 diary extracts
Talks with teachers	October 2005-May 2006	3 hours
Email conversations with teachers	October 2005-May 2006	5 emails
Talks with school administrators	October 2005-May 2006	2 hours
School documents and work samples	May-June 2005	150 pages
	October 2005-May 2006	
Follow-up narrative interviews with 6 Chinese students	May-June 2006	9 hours

Each data set corresponded to a different site of representation. The core data sets included classroom observation, observation in a range of contexts outside the classroom, informal talks, phone and email conversations with students, student diaries and follow-up narrative interviews. I will explain each of these in more detail below in this section. Besides the core data sets, I had some talks and email conversations with language teachers to explore certain issues which arose in the research process, such as ‘how does the language teacher categorise his or her students?’. Talks with school administrators helped me gaining some knowledge of the programmes that the participants studied in the language school, and the organisation of school activities and events. I also collected some school documents and work samples, which consisted of the timetables of each language school, the progress reports of the participants, and various teaching materials used by different language teachers. With these documents and samples, I was able to arrange my classroom observation in three language schools, track the participants’ improvements in their English language learning, and get better understanding of the language teachers’ teaching practice.

May to June 2005: Pilot study

My first challenge was to find language schools that were willing to let me conduct a long-term project. I chose Crawley Language School to conduct a pilot study for the following reasons: they offer long-term English courses up to one year; there was a group of Chinese students who had registered for long-term programmes; and the principal of Crawley

Language School was willing to help my research. A University Access Course, which runs for three terms starting in September, turned out to be the most suitable course for my study. Introduced by the Principal, I obtained the permission of the teacher of the University Access Course (IELTS Preparation) to observe lessons, and then carried out non-participant classroom observation once a week in his course for two months. In total, there were eight students in this target class, and four of them were Chinese. These four Chinese students were all female, and from Mainland China. The same first language, same nationality, and similar age made me become familiar with the participants quickly.

This English course was highly structured for the IELTS preparation purpose, and the learners were required to do exercises in English speaking, listening, reading and writing. The teacher was energetic, engaging and humorous. Field notes were taken for each class, and significant events were addressed. The pilot study assured me that classroom would be a productive site to investigate how Chinese learners' identities are reconstructed through English learning in Britain from the following perspectives: Chinese learners' identities are challenged through inter-culture communication with the English teacher and the student from other countries; there is a paradox between ESL learning environment outside the classroom and EFL learning context in the classroom; and the English learning experience in the classroom in Britain is quite different from the classroom in China. I started the pilot study with a focus on gender identity and second language learning because of my own research interest, but after the two-month pilot study, I realised that the participants' gender identities were intertwined with their national identities, and social class identities, and it would be inappropriate to investigate gender identity alone in this context.

June to August 2005: Narrative interview

As most Chinese learners in Crawley Language School were going to finish their courses in June, and would continue their studies in British Universities from October, I decided to conduct interviews with the Chinese learners who had studied English language in Britain for more than six months, to gain some insight into their experiences related to identity issues that these learners had had in Britain. With the assistance of my participants in the University Access Course and the teachers in Crawley Language School and the teachers in Living Language Centre (a language school attached to a local university), I introduced my project to the unfamiliar Chinese learners in these two language schools. Although a number of Chinese learners expressed their interests, most of them were studying short-term English language programmes. In the end, five Chinese learners in Crawley Language School and four Chinese learners in Living Language Centre were invited to participate in my interviews.

Narrative interview was adopted, when I realised it was impossible to ask the participants to talk about their identities directly, since 'identity' was an unfamiliar sociological concept to them. In order to explore how the Chinese learners make sense of their identities and to what extent their particular identities intersect with their investment in English learning, I used interview questions in a narrative style to invite interviewees' personal experiences. In respect of the complex and unique nature of a person's identity, a narrative format allows interviewees to present views that are not necessarily filtered

through a perspective that assumes uniformity of experiences. Narrative style interviews encourage interviewees to take responsibility for the meaning of their talk, and tell some experiences that are of deep and abiding interests to the interviewees, rather than reporting their sociological opinions (Chase, 1995).

It is too naive to assume that narration has no structure; instead, a narrative is usually formally structured (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000), and a narrative interview has to be designed carefully. Despite the popularity of conducting narrative enquiry in recent second language research (see the discussion in Section 3.7), qualitative researchers rarely focus specifically on eliciting narratives in the interview context. It is not simply to ask for and attend to another's story in the interview context. Conducting a successful narrative interview lies in the questions the researcher asks, and more deeply, in the orientation towards interviewees embedded in interview questions (Chase, 1995). Interviewees are not objects and should not be treated as objects; they have their own agendas and research should try to address them, hence the interview questions should not be the sole prerogative of the researcher (Cameron *et al.*, 1992).

The narrative interviews with the Chinese learners were revealing, however the process of developing narrative interview questions was much more complicated and time-consuming than I had expected. It took me one month to draft the narrative interview questions, and the whole process included four steps. Firstly, I identified related topics from three-hour informal conversations with one participant. I had two lengthy informal conversations with a participant before I drafted the interview questions. From these two conversations, I realised which topics would reflect interviewees' gender identities, such as

their expectations of their boy/girl friend; the power relationship in the family, which has a strong influence on the participants' personalities, and their attitudes towards English language learning and living experiences in Britain. Then, I shaped interview questions in a narrative style inspired by Chase (1995), Hoffman (1998), and Norton (2000), amongst others. A literature review of ethnographic and autobiographic studies in SLL area had helped the development of my interview questions from different perspectives. Interview questions should be phrased in everyday rather than sociological language, such as 'gender identity', even like 'how do you feel about being a Chinese woman/man'. When I asked 'sociological questions' (Chase, 1995), such as 'has your gender identity changed during your English language learning journey in Britain?', I either got no answers, since interviewees could not understand the questions; or I got what I asked for, but not what I was most interested in hearing, because the interviewees tended to give a summary of what they assumed to be many Chinese learners' experiences. The sociological questions invite interviewees to report their observation and imaginations of what Chinese learners in general do rather than to recount what he or she in particular has done and their personal feelings. The narrative interview questions attempted to address gender identity and English language learning, but interviewees' perceptions of their national identity and class identity emerged naturally together with their gender identity in the interview process. Subsequently, I developed interview questions through different narrative genres, such as topic-centred narrative (e.g. Do you find any difference between studying English in China and in Britain? What's the difference?) and hypothetical narrative (e.g. Suppose you were a male/female Chinese student, would this make your English learning experience or living

experience in Britain different?). Finally, I piloted narrative interview questions with one participant. These four steps were not planned, but emerged as practical procedures of developing my narrative interview questions.

Although the basic interview questions had been piloted carefully (see the interview questions in Appendix I), they did not work smoothly with every interviewee in the interview process. For instance, most interviewees gave me a colourful picture about their family backgrounds in response to my request, 'tell me something about your family'. Rui, however, refused to answer this question, for he could not see the necessity of answering this question. Every interviewee was unique and coded by his or her own life experiences in various ways; each interpreted the general interview questions differently, and drove the direction of the interview through their embodiment in specific life stories. As a result, the uniqueness of narratives produced extremely rich data.

The individual interviews were conducted mainly in Chinese and recorded by digital recorder for a period of roughly an hour each. The interviews were set in my house, or the interviewees' own houses, or the pub, or the refectory, or outdoors depending on where the interviewees felt comfortable. The interviewees were invited to tell their own stories about English learning and living experiences in Britain. It is necessary to be aware that each particular story generated from the interview is one instance of the polyphonic versions of the possible presentation of interviewees' selves and lives. These stories are constructed and presented by interviewees with regard to specific momentary influences, such as the aim of the interview, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, or the mood of the interviewee (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998, p. 8). This narrative data displayed a

comprehensive version of interviewees' senses of themselves and how they understand their long-time learning journey in Britain. These life stories provided some indications of what should be observed in the subsequent classroom observation, and what needed to be explored with the participants of my case study.

October 2005 to June 2006: Case study

Due to changes in the UK visa system over the last 19 months, the number of Chinese applicants to study in Britain dropped to its historically lowest point in 2005 (Education Travel, 2005). After checking the number of Chinese learners in four local language schools, it became evident that it would be impossible to get enough Chinese learners to participate in a long-term study from only one language school. Access to any language school and classroom depends on the Headteacher, the study director, and the teacher of the class in question. A range of factors will influence these people's decisions as to whether to allow the researcher to access, for example, the teacher may feel uncomfortable in trying a new teaching strategy if there is a researcher sitting in on their classes, or the teacher may not want to be observed as frequently as the researcher proposes. After negotiation with the teachers in different language schools, I obtained permission to do classroom observation with four Chinese learners in Crawley Language School, one Chinese learner in Spencer Language School, and one Chinese learner in Living Language Centre. The four participants in Crawley Language School were registered in the International Business Foundation Programme, while the two participants in Spencer

Language School and Living Language Centre were registered separately in General English programmes. The six participants ranged in age from 18 to 22, and all of them came from Mainland China. Fifty percent of my participants were female.

I conducted non-participant classroom observation with four participants in Crawley Language School twice a week, and participants in Spencer Language School and Living Language Centre once a week separately to examine how they were learning English in the formal institutional environment. Detailed field notes were made during observation, and long significant discussions arising in the classroom were recorded and transcribed. The field notes actually worked as a main research tool in the ten-month classroom observation, since a huge amount of transcription work would be required if I had only used a digital recorder to record all the classes I had observed. I observed and made field notes during the class from the start, using three different empty notebooks for three language schools respectively. I tried to note down (1) any conversation and non-verbal behaviour that appeared to pertain to identity; (2) the arrangement of the classroom; and (3) my own thoughts on the events related to identity and my research process. The field notes were as thorough and detailed as I would have liked them to be (see the examples of field notes in Appendix II).

Restoring the full context of SLL may be impossible, but a broader context is the key to much better understanding of the process. In order to draw a holistic picture of my project, and to acknowledge the multiple levels of experiences which informed my participants' everyday lives in Britain, I included data from different settings, such as the common rooms in the language schools, coffee shops, restaurants, supermarkets, my house,

and my participants' houses. Frequent informal face to face conversations in different settings, phone and email conversations helped me gather the data on what was going on with their English language learning and lives outside the classroom. I hoped that these informal settings would facilitate the expression and analysis of personal and private experiences. At this level, I wanted the participants to perceive me as another Chinese student and a friend, or an elder sister as some of them called me 'Sister Feng'. I did not want my role as researcher to dominate my relationship with the participants, as I thought this might create too much distance between us. This was the main reason that I did not use a digital recorder to record these informal conversations, but took notes immediately afterwards. In addition, I had no choice but to use field notes to collect data from my participant/non-participant observation in some settings outside the classroom. Some interesting issues were raised, for example, when I had a lunch with Jin in a restaurant, when I accompanied Xu to sort out the problem of his credit card in a local bank, or when I went shopping with Yin in the high street. However, it would have been unrealistic and unnatural for me to take out a digital recorder immediately to record all these spontaneous conversations. My good memory for utterances allowed me to make detailed notes shortly after these events. The notes were converted to the proximity of the conversation, which I constructed carefully, and would be as faithful as possible to the original.

The participant's diaries were another fruitful source of data, as they provided important personal insights of a reflective nature, which were less accessible through observation and interview. They thus offered a different kind of record of the Chinese learners' experiences and preoccupations. Another reason for the use of diaries was that

they are a form of communication, which takes the pressure off the speaker. There is no wait time for responses, no awkward long pauses, no pressure to respond. Research participants can formulate in their own time what they want to say, and the discourse is not shaped by the researcher.

In the field of SLL research, a number of researchers have made use of diary studies to explore the process of SLL. However, most of these diaries were written due to the researchers' requests, and were constructed by the researchers' guidelines, which are not constant with the free narrative nature of diary. For instance, Brown (1984) required his participants, who were studying Spanish in an intensive formal programme in the United States, to spend 15 minutes a day writing entries in their journals about their language learning experiences. Most of the entries referenced by Brown dealt with student responses to formal aspects of grammar teaching and the scheduling of the classes, and there were some hints of resistance by some students at being required to perform this duty. My diary study had a very different purpose as it encouraged the participant to write about her English learning and living experiences in Britain according to her own orientation, rather than responding to my research requirement, so I did not give Yin any instruction in writing her diary. This is evident in Yin's statement about her own motivation for writing diaries, 'I feel I'm getting old now. I will become an old granny one day, I'm afraid my memory will be blank when I look back my life at that moment. I'm afraid I will lose my memory one day, and then I will forget my most beloved person, my most favourite place and thing... So I continue to write diaries to record every minute and every second of my life, to record all the happiness and sadness. Then I will have no regret in my whole life'

(Yin's diary, 01/11/05). Yin used her MSN blog to write her diary mainly in Chinese, so that all of her friends, including me, could read her diary and write comments through the Internet. This self-constructed data probes and acknowledges me with the Chinese learners' deep psychological development processes, and the enigmatic and unexpected aspects of their life experiences in Britain.

Using diary studies was beneficial in that it provided a very different aspect of data on the participant's account. When my supervisor suggested I should use diary studies in my main study, I was hesitant because I did not pay the participants to participate in my study, and I had no right to ask them to write diaries for me. The only possibility would be that if some of the participants were in the habit of writing diaries, they might be happy to let me use their diaries as data resources. When I asked the six primary participants, 'do you write diaries?', all of them said 'no', except Yin who answered, 'I do not write diaries, but I write blogs in MSN Space, and I update it four or five times a week.' When I accessed Yin's blogs through the internet, I found out that they were an electronic version of Yin's diaries, in which Yin wrote about her daily life and her feelings. Later, I discovered that Jin and Xu also wrote blogs at different websites, but they only updated them once or twice a month. Fan actually wrote 'traditional' diaries by pen, but she was unwilling to show them to others. As a result, I could only collect diary data from Yin.

May to June 2006: Follow-up narrative interview

In June 2006, the six participants completed their programmes in the language schools, and

I had follow-up narrative interviews with each of them. The purpose of this interview was to explain if, and how the participants' views on their identities had changed in the intervening period. This follow-up narrative interview adopted most of the interview questions that were used in the narrative interview conducted in June to August 2005. Certain crucial issues on their gender identity, national identity, social class identity and language learner identity were addressed in the interview. Since I had already followed the six participants for nine months, I had become very familiar with them, which allowed me to ask some particular questions in relation to their personal learning and living experiences in Britain. Although the six participants' oral English had improved noticeably during their stay in Britain, they still felt more relaxed to tell their own stories in Chinese. Thus, the six follow-up narrative interviews were conducted mainly in Chinese and recorded by digital recorder for a period of roughly an hour and a half each.

3.9 Translation and transcription

I transcribed the classroom recordings soon after making them, so that I could check actual English words and phrases on the recordings which had been unclear to me with the participants. All the fifteen interviews in Chinese were translated and transcribed from sound files into English after the data collection period. I had translated and transcribed all the interviews by myself, and this involved my playing each recording on my computer at least five times. Since I had known most of the participants before I conducted interviews with them, I was familiar with their voices, their Chinese accents, and their ways of

speaking. This allowed me to identify most Chinese words they spoke in the interviews and also catch their meanings. The translation was made according to my understanding of the interviewees' utterances. Later, I asked a Chinese PhD student in our department to listen to the recordings and check some parts of the translation about which I felt uncertain. After this process, I felt confident that the participants had been ably represented by the transcripts. When the excerpts were taken from the body of Yin's diaries, they were translated from Chinese into English to make the content accessible to the English-speaking reader.

I found that it was a very valuable exercise in listening to and hearing the participants' voices, as well as reflecting on what they said, and how they said it. The translation and transcription process of the interviews provided me a vague but holistic impression of the participants' English learning journeys in Britain before I undertook data analysis systematically.

3.10 Data analysis

This present study seeks to provide some understanding of the relationship between identity and SLL. The analysis of the data centres on established principles of qualitative field studies. Wolcott (1994) suggests a major challenge for qualitative researchers is not how to get data, but how to decide what to do with the data they get. The three ways in which he suggests data can be presented are defined as descriptive, analytical and interpretive respectively. This present study draws to a greater or lesser extent on all three-

presentation formats. To a lesser extent, in the voices of the Chinese learners, the data speak for themselves; to some extent, an analysis proceeds from systematic comparisons and contrasts among the data, and to a greater extent I have sought to reach for understanding and explanation that goes beyond a limited conception of analysis.

This present study is grounded in the accounts of the participants, and the analysis seeks to find ways to understand each case in its specificity and complexity. Considering the rich and concentrated data produced from the six primary participants, only the data collected from the case study and follow-up narrative interview were analysed systematically. The first strategy I took was to organise each individual Chinese learner's data into one composite file. There was a separate file for Lan, Fan, Zhu, Jin, Xu and Yin. Each student's file included the student's background, notes of informal conversation with me, and interviews, and Yin's file also had her diary entries. All elements of the data sets, including the interview transcripts, the transcripts of some classroom discussions, all field notes and Yin's diary entries, were coded with short phrases, such as 'gender', 'nationality', 'social class', 'ESL/EFL', 'the use of Chinese' or 'the researcher's role'. These phrases indicated the contents of pieces of data, and suggested the potential for developing categories. Coding, as the first step of analysis, requires the researcher to make judgments about the meanings of contiguous blocks of text (Ryan and Bernard, 2003), and the relationship between the data and the research questions.

Secondly, a detailed separate analysis was conducted for each student to ensure the integrity of the data as representing as far as possible the experiences of these students in relation to the research questions. I categorised all the data that pertained to the Chinese

learners' experiences implicated in the production of gender identity, national identity, social class identity and language learner identity of each case. I then started to write up a comprehensive chapter on each participant, which would allow me to make cross-references across both historical time and social space. I chose one of the participants, Jin, as my initial starting point, because his account seemed to be the most fruitful in generating insights about English language learning and identity. I then wrote three chapters on Zhu, Fan and Lan respectively, since they were in the same class with Jin, and learnt English together in the language school. Finally, I finished the chapters on Xu and Yin. During the writing process, I reduced the many categories to a number of themes, with coded data supported. Writing, as a method of discovery and analysis (Richardson, 2003), helped me to think through the data and to figure out the coherent development of individual learner's multiple identities. This was a valuable exercise, which gave me a broad picture of each of my participants, and insights into their backgrounds and their experiences as English language learners in Britain. Although these chapters read like anecdotal stories, they provided me a basis for comparing the data of different participants by themes, and to capture the similarities between each case.

In order to help me focus on different parts of the data, the third strategy I took was to summarise the key themes, with coded data attached as supporting evidence, for all six participants. This allowed me to see the extent to which an issue is represented across cases, and to grasp common threads across cases. The focus of this phase was to determine in which ways the insights from the individual cases might have broader implications. This consisted of distilling and clarifying the main themes and patterns from each case, and then

focusing on commonalities and differences. Successive passes through the data enabled tentative hypotheses and links back to the theoretical framework and the literature, which developed throughout the analysis. Results from this phase of the analysis comprise the following chapters.

Within the framework of my analysis, text analyses draw on key concepts from grounded theory (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) and categorical-content mode of analysis (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998) in respect of the interpretive nature of this present study and the narrative nature of the data. Grounded theory aims to understand people's experiences in a rigorous and detailed manner, so it concerns the discovery of data induced hypotheses, identifies categories and concepts that emerge from text, and then links these concepts into substantive theories (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Because grounded theory is 'grounded' in the data, I coded the data with an open mind, and identified potential themes by pulling together real examples from the text. As coding categories emerge, I compared and contrasted themes constantly, and tried to summarise my ideas about what is going on in the text. The processes of making comparisons and asking questions are specifically detailed to inform and guide analysis and to facilitate theorising process.

The categorical-content approach is adopted in the analysis, because when I finished the second phase of data analysis, the problems and phenomena shared by the six participants started to emerge. Categorical-content approach aims at 'getting to the implicit content' by asking about what meaning a certain section of the story conveys, 'what traits or motives of the individual are displayed', and 'what a certain image used by the narrator symbolizes' (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998, p. 12-13). Categorical-content analysis usually takes

four steps: selecting ‘the subtext’, defining ‘the content categories’, ‘sorting the material into the categories’ and ‘drawing conclusions from the results’ (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998, p. 112-114). The six comprehensive chapters on the participants joined together as a new text. Although this new text was considered as the content universe of this study, it was treated in a characteristically independent way. I then drew subtext from the new text, read it as openly as possible, and defined the major content categories that emerged from the reading. The major content categories were suggested by the text, but it was unavoidable for me to bring my own commonsense assumptions to the reading. This process was closely linked to next stage: separate utterances and descriptions of the six participants were extracted, classified, and assigned to relevant categories. Existing categories were refined and new categories were added in respect of research goals and practical considerations. These categories were composed of subcategories, which represented multiple perspectives about the categories. Finally, the contents collected in each category were used descriptively to formulate a picture of the content universe in the six participants. Some possible answers to the research questions appeared in this stage. These four steps in the analytic procedure are illustrated in the following example to allow the reader to track my analytic process.

Step 1. Selecting ‘English learning experience’ section across six chapters on the participants as the subtext;

Step 2. Defining a content category: ‘English pronunciation goal’;

Step 3. Sorting the data into this category, and developing subcategorise:

‘British English accent goal’

Jin: If you speak the second language well, you feel successful. When you speak frequently, your accent and your tone sound native-like, you have no problem in

communication, and then you will feel good in speaking the second language. (Interview, 27/05/06)

F: Do you mind your Chinese English accent? Or do you try to imitate a British English accent?

Xu: I try to imitate a British English accent, but the distance still exists, since my first language is not English. I will try my best.

F: What's your aim in imitating British English?

Xu: When I do something, I should try my best to do it well. Since you come to the UK, you should learn authentic British English.

F: Do you aim to pronounce accurately or acquire a British accent?

Xu: It's best if I can achieve both. My first aim is to make my pronunciation understandable to others, and my second aim is to speak Standard English.

F: Standard English equals to British English?

Xu: Yeah. (Interview, 24/05/06)

F: Do you think the UK is an ideal place for learning English?

Yin: Yes, especially England. I feel the accent here is quite authentic; at least the people you meet speak British English. The people in Scotland have very strong accents. If you go to study English in other countries, such as the US, the English in the US is not traditional English anymore. (Interview, 14/05/06)

'American English accent goal'

F: Did you think about coming to the UK to learn British English?

Fan: My pronunciation has an American accent. When I changed host families, they asked me, 'have you stayed in the US?' I said, 'no, but the teacher of my 'One to One' course is an American.' I didn't imagine that I got an American accent in three months. I prefer an American accent. (Interview, 13/06/06)

'Intelligibility goal'

F: Do you watch TV here?

Lan: Yes, but sometimes, the TV programmes are not interesting, and I will download some films from the Internet.

F: But American English is spoken in most films.

Lan: I don't care. I can't distinguish between British English and American English very clearly, except a few words. If others can understand me, that's fine. I don't care whether it's American English or British English. Although American English is spoken in the film, it sounds similar to British English, except some stresses.

F: But the accents are quite different.

Lan: I feel they are similar. (Interview, 08/06/06)

Step 4. Drawing a conclusion: all six participants came to Britain to learn English, but they had diverse speaking English goals in terms of accent and intelligibility, which constituted part of their various language learners' identities.

3.11 The thematic structuring of the data chapters and my writing notes

After describing my data analysis process in detail, I now move to address how the discussion of data is thematically structured in the following four data chapters, and how this grows out of my data analysis. The themes of the data chapters firstly emerged from the second phase of my data analysis (see Section 3.10), when I was writing up a comprehensive chapter on each primary participant. I then summarised the main themes across the six chapters on primary participants in the third phase of my data analysis (see Section 3.10). These main themes are:

- a) The issues related to gender identity: a masculine father; a dominant mother; gendered self-image; trying to find a girl friend — a task in the real world; Chinese girls and boys in Britain; playing with gender; facing contradictive gender issues; adapting to new gender ideologies.
- b) The issues related to national identity: confused nationality on the first arrival; perceived as a Chinese by language teachers; finding the difference from South Korean students; displaying the role of a Chinese; a patriotic Chinese learner; comparing Chinese with British; comparing Chinese with Japanese and South Korean; attitudes towards overseas students of other nationalities; attitudes towards other Chinese students;.
- c) The issues related to social class identity: classifying the family; perceiving others'

class identities; class does make difference; perceptions of part-time jobs; class-marked lifestyles in Britain; awareness of spending.

- d) The issues related to language learner identity: English acquisition in natural English-speaking contexts; EFL learning experience in the language school;

Based on these four groups of themes, I developed four data chapters: Chapter Four — gender identity and second language learning, Chapter Five — construction of national identity and discursive social interaction, Chapter Six — social class identity and second language learning, and Chapter Seven — language learner identity and legitimate peripheral participation. All this demonstrates that the discussion of data in the following four data chapters was generated by the way as the data spoke to me, rather than led by my research questions.

In presenting my discussion of data, I have made certain decisions on how to present the data resources: there are occasions when I refer to special extracts from observation, interview, talk and diary, where I do make special reference to individual piece of data; there are other occasions when I talk very generally about the overall picture of what was going on, where I do not make special reference, because it would be too chaotic to source every part of data. There is a strong tradition of qualitative writing, which does not make special reference to this (see, for instance, Norton, 2000; Miller, 2003; Morita, 2004).

3.12 Ethical considerations

This research project adheres to my university's guidelines as documented in 'Ethical Protocol for the Conduct of Academic Research'. All the participants were informed about the aims, the purposes and the nature of this present study before participating in the study. Official permission to undertake classroom observation was obtained from the directors of Crawley Language School, Living Language Centre and Spencer Language School separately. Permissions were also obtained from all the observed teachers and students. I respected the privacy and psychological well-being of the individuals being studied, and they had a say in the scheduling of observation. Since this present study lasted an extended period, the participants always had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I kept the participants informed of the process of my project. The outcome of this study will also be sent to all the participants when I complete my study. All of the data was treated as confidential, and presented as anonymous. I have duly changed the names of all the participants and the names of all the language schools mentioned in this thesis.

3.13 Limitations of the study

Several limitations should be acknowledged in regard to this study. First, this is a small-scale individual study, which only represents a small number of Chinese learner participants. The participants' stories are not representative of all the Chinese learners in Britain. Second, the three language schools in my study are located in southeast England. I feel these language schools are not unordinary but representative of private language schools in Britain, however, I can only infer that the issues raised in this study might take

place elsewhere. Third, although the data collection phase extended for over a year, this was but a brief space of time in terms of the broad focal issues of English language learning and negotiation of identity. Also, the case study situates the Chinese learners at a specific time and space, capturing elements of their early learning and living experiences in Britain, both of which changed and will continue to change over time. These cases are therefore not easily generalisable to other international students in different phases of their second language learning, although this is not to say a degree of generalisation is not possible in the concluding summary and discussion. Overall the concern of the methodology of this study lay with credibility, which was based on evidence gained in the fieldwork and tying interpretation to data rather than generalisability of findings, and with plausible reasoning rather than proof. Finally, I had a great influence over the whole research process. Although I have tried to avoid over-claiming, under-claiming and other traps of the qualitative researcher, my subjective interpretations may not all seem plausible to the reader. The data that I have presented may have quite different meanings for other researchers. But I have tried to present sufficient data to sustain my own interpretation, and enough to allow for other readings as well.

3.14 The biography of the six primary participants

There were fifteen Chinese students in total participants in the main study of this research project. The data collection phase of the main study covered a period of twelve months. In the last nine months, I focused on six primary participants during the case study and the

follow-up narrative interview. Data presented in this thesis only comprises the six participants. Considering the voices of particular Chinese learners, their distinctive histories, their unique desires for the future, biographical insights are important in developing and enhancing understanding of the relationship between their identities and English language learning (Norton, 2000). Furthermore, as I discussed in Section 3.6, a suitable thick description of research participants allows the reader of a case study to ‘determine the generalisability of findings to their particular situation or to other situations’ (Gall *et al.*, 2003, p. 466). With these spirits, I provide below a preliminary introduction to each of the six Chinese students. I will typically introduce the information about the six primary participants’ ages, family backgrounds, living situations in Britain, English learning histories in Britain and in China, motivations for study in Britain and personalities. These descriptions provide considerable depth and insight into each participant, and give background information that will set up a discourse for understanding the six Chinese learners’ experiences, which I will discuss in the following four data chapters.

Jin

Jin, aged 18, an only child, came from a mixed family in Anshan, as his father was South Korean, and his mother was Taiwanese. Both of Jin’s parents graduated from Peking University, the most prestigious university in China. Jin’s father ran a business by himself, and his mother managed two restaurants and a hotel. He could speak Mandarin, Korean, English and a little Japanese. He had travelled to Japan and the United States before he

came to the UK. Jin arrived in Britain in June 2005. He took a 'One to One' English course immediately in a small centre in southeast England, where he remained until August. He continued to take a 'One to One' English course in another town in southeast England in September. Then he registered in the 36-week International Business Foundation Programme at Crawley Language School, and lived with a host family. Since Jin planned to study biology in a British university, he also took A-level biology courses in a local public school in the afternoon.

Jin had learnt English in China from kindergarten to high school. He had also taken a part-time English class taught by an American from the third year of his primary school, in which he stayed for 5 years. He learnt English grammar systematically in his high school. Jin had rare chances to use English in social settings in China. In 2004, Jin participated in an English drama competition in Beijing, and won the award as an excellent director. So he got the opportunity to study in America for half a year. He arrived in Birmingham, Alabama, and stayed in a host family for the first month. Then he went to study English in Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and lived in a dormitory.

Jin's mixed intercultural family background and his previous study abroad experiences made him adapt to the life in Britain more quickly than other Chinese students. Coming to a totally different culture and society was neither strange nor scary for him, Jin was familiar with communicating with people from different countries, he was open to accept different culture issues, and he had a strong desire to communicate with native English speakers and engage in British culture. Although Jin had had high expectations on his learning journey in Britain when he was in China, he had a positive attitude towards the

difficulties he had met in Britain, as he put it, 'I will strengthen myself through the bad experiences of staying in Britain' (Talk with Jin, 19/01/06).

Zhu

Twenty-two year old Zhu arrived in Britain from Yueyang in June 2005 following his elder sister, who was doing her bachelor's degree in London. Zhu's father was a land agent, and his mother worked as an accountant in his father's company. After taking a two-month IELTS preparation course in London, Zhu began to study the 36-week International Business Foundation Programme at Crawley Language School in September 2005. Zhu shared a house with three Chinese, a Czech and a Belgian. He worked as a cleaner in a local hospital from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm, from Monday to Friday. Zhu considered the part-time job as training for himself. Thus he was very busy with his study and part-time job.

Zhu began to learn English from the first year in middle school in China, and his English was very poor. Zhu quit Southwest University of Political Science & Law in Chongqing, China, and decided to further his study in Britain, because he wanted to escape from his life in Chongqing. This was the first big decision Zhu had made for himself in his life. Zhu did not study in his university; instead, he had an unbelievable dissipated life in Chongqing. When I heard his story in the interview on 3 June 2006, I was shocked and I could not connect the story with the Zhu I had known for nine months.

Zhu: You can't imagine how crazy I played in Chongqing, and how much money I could spend. The cost of living in Chongqing is quite low, but I spent 10,000 RMB

per month, and it's just the pocket money.

F: How could you spend so much money?

Zhu: I drank in the pub every day.

F: I think you went to buy sex (joking).

Zhu: Sometimes.

F: Really?

Zhu: We had one-night stands. It's very normal...I called my father in the end, and I told him, 'I can't continue my study in Chongqing'. I wanted to escape. All of my friends in Chongqing were playing around crazily. If I couldn't leave the environment, I wouldn't calm down and study. (Interview, 03/06/06)

Zhu was a very mature young student, and he had a clear orientation towards study in Britain, which made him now determined to face the difficulties in Britain.

Fan

Fan was 18 when she left Beijing for Britain in June 2005. When I first met Fan, I was surprised by her unselfish character, which was not common in her generation. Fan explained to me that because she had a younger sister, she got used to always caring about others. Fan's mother was running an international business and her father worked for her mother as an assistant.

After she arrived in Britain, Fan took a 'One to One' English course with an American couple from June to August. Fan then changed to another 'One to One' course with a middle age woman in another town in September. Fan began to take the 36-week International Business Foundation Programme at Crawley Language School in September 2005.

Fan began to learn English from the third year in primary school. She had a private

English tutor from primary school to high school, who mainly taught her grammar and vocabulary. Her English was good, but Fan preferred learning Chinese rather than English.

Study abroad was Fan's dream, which was inspired by her mother's experience. Fan's mother went to attend a conference in the US in the early 1990s and stayed there for one year, and Fan found her mother changed a lot after she came back from the US. Fan looked forward to the change of her life and the change of herself in her study abroad journey, as she was unsatisfied with her easy and invariable life in China. Study in Britain was the chance to bring some freshness to Fan's steady life. Fan was ready to face the difficulties in her learning journey in Britain.

No matter what kind of problems I will have in my study abroad journey, I will stick to the end. This will be my life experience. So I think I need to study abroad.
(Interview, 13/06/06)

Lan

Eighteen-year-old Lan also came from Beijing, and arrived in Britain in May 2005. Lan had a six-year old younger brother. Her father worked as a manager in a company, and her mother was a housewife. Following her cousin-sister, who had already finished her one-year study in Crawley Language School and began to do her bachelor's degree in a British university, as Lan planned to study a bachelor's degree in business in a British university.

After taking a four-month general English course and a pre-accessional course in Crawley Language School, Lan began to take the 36-week International Business Foundation Programme from September 2005. Lan shared a house with a Chinese, a

Taiwanese, and a South Korean, who also was her classmate.

Lan began to learn English from the first year of her middle school. Then she continued her high school in Hai Dian Foreign Language School, which had a tradition in preparing students to study abroad. Lan was good at English, especially grammar. Lan's father had not planned to send Lan to study abroad until Lan was in the second year in high school. At that time, Lan's cousin sister began to study in Britain, and felt good about her learning experience. This pushed Lan's father into making the final decision on sending Lan studying in Britain.

Lan was a simple and happy girl. She liked cooking, and spent one hour doing cooking every day. Watching cartoons was Lan's favourite hobby. Lan behaved like a little girl, who kept herself in her own 'tower'. She did not care what happened outside, if it did not influence her life directly. To sum up, Lan enjoyed her free life in Britain.

After school, I watch TV, sleep or watch cartoons. I feel quite good. I didn't feel free when I was in China, since my study was very busy. I feel quite free here, since no one controls me. (Interview, 08/06/06)

Xu

Xu, an only child, arrived in Britain from Lingshi in October 2005. He was 20 years old, and his parents had divorced one year ago. Xu's father was a senior local governor, and his mother worked as a registered accountant. Xu refused to talk about his family until he became familiar with me. Xu registered in the 10-month General English Language Programme in Spencer Language School after his arrival. He lived in a host family, and

shared a room with a Japanese boy.

Xu began to learn English from the first year of middle school. His English was very poor. Xu failed to pass the Chinese National University Entrance Examination in China, so his parents sent him to Britain to study English and pursue higher education. Xu had been working for his uncle, who was running a coal industry, as a secretary for four months before he came to Britain.

Because of the situation of his family and his life experience, Xu appeared more mature compared to his fellows. He became the leader of a group of male Chinese students in Spencer Language School easily. When he was in China, Xu was always introduced to others as 'Governor X's son', but here, he was known as Xu. No one approached him, because of his family. Life tended to be simpler for him in Britain, which made Xu felt relieved. Furthermore, Xu received more consideration from his father in Britain, who called him weekly. When Xu was in China, his father did not care even if he had not seen Xu for 20 days.

Yin

The eldest of the six participants, Yin was 24 when she left Guangzhou for Britain. Yin was the only child of her family, her father worked as a vice general manager in a big vehicle company, and her mother had retired because of health problem. Yin arrived in England in October 2005, and began to take the 10-month General English Language Programme in Living Language Centre, the English language teaching centre of a British university. Yin

lived in a house arranged by the university. She shared the house firstly with two British girls and one Ukrainian girl. One month later, one British girl moved out, and a Ukrainian boy moved in.

Yin had received her bachelor's degree in China, and planned to do a master's degree in industrial arts in Britain. She had learnt English from the fifth year in primary school up to the first year in university. Her English was very poor in middle school, but improved a lot in high school.

Yin was a feminine woman, who cared about her physical appearance, the nutrition of the food, and the affective support from her family and her friends. She was also optimistic, and she thought this characteristic was quite important for learning English in Britain, otherwise, she would feel homesick all the time. Yin tried to be brave and independent, while in fact, she was very sensitive and emotional.

3.15 Summary

The theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two of this thesis has important methodological consequences. Viewing SLL as a complex process of (re)construction of second language learners' multiple and dynamic identities means that the relationship between identity and SLL cannot be explored in a quantitative research tradition. In this chapter, I have drawn on particular strengths of qualitative research tradition, constructivist paradigm, ethnographic and case study strategies and narrative approach as more appropriate to my study. I then outlined in some detail the methods of data collection, and

described the analytic tools used and the methods of data analysis. Finally, I offered in-depth information regarding each of the six primary participants. These profiles give a comprehensive backdrop to the Chinese learners' experiences presented throughout the following chapters, and will help the reader understand the personality and story behind those experiences. What remains is to enter into the detail of the six participants' English language learning and living experiences in Britain, and to explore the research questions in the light of their voices.

Chapter Four: Gender Identity and Second Language Learning

This is the first chapter of four data discussion chapters. I start my data discussion with gender, as it was the initial focus of interest of my PhD study. Gender, as a system of social relations and discursive practices, influences differential learning of a second language. This chapter deals with findings about the relationship between gender identity and second language learning (SLL). My discussion will touch four key areas where gender is central in SLL: (a) gendered agency in SLL; (b) gendered access to linguistic resources and interaction opportunities; (c) gendered nature of linguistic interaction; and (d) negotiation of second language learners' gender identities. Then, I will discuss the implications of these findings.

4.1 Gendered power relationship in the family

According to the six participants' utterances and behaviour, which will be presented in the following chapter, they appeared to have already formed their own gender ideologies in China before they first arrived in Britain. Given that this was the first time for all six participants except Zhu to live totally independently from their families for an extended period of time, I wonder that their parents might play the most important role in shaping their gender identities, as the data suggests that how the parents behaved, and what they believed in appear to be the ones that the participants tended to imitate or to resist.

4.1.1 A dominant father

In Zhu, Lan, Yin and Xu's families, fathers were the most powerful persons, while their powerful impact was either respected or restrained by their children in various degrees. In Zhu's heart, his father was his hero, who was born in a very poor family, and had done various jobs, such as ice-cream seller and builder, but finally ran his own real estate company in Xueyang. Zhu's father was very strict with his children. As Zhu grew up, he changed his attitude towards his father from fear to veneration. Zhu would follow his father's decision no matter whether he agreed or disagreed, as he stated in the interview,

Zhu: We will respect all of his opinions, although some opinions are wrong. I don't want to make him feel sad.

F: You are not going to argue with your father, although you disagree with your father?

Zhu: I will argue with him, but if he insists in the end, I will give up. (Interview, 03/06/06)

This extract exemplifies Zhu's father's absolute power in his family, and his great impact on Zhu. Similar to Zhu, Xu also fully respected his father's power, but he also respected his mother, who developed her own career independently. He tried to see the positive aspects of his father's decisions, and then agreed with his father while reserving his own opinions, rather than challenging his father's authority. Thus, after failing to pass the National University Entrance Examination, Xu obeyed his father's decision to study in Britain.

My father wanted me to study abroad long long ago. My mother is a traditional

woman, but she is very strong. This is a paradox. Actually, my mother didn't want me studying abroad, and she just wanted me work close to her...Although my father also wants me staying with him now, but he chose this way for my future and our family's future. (Interview, 24/05/06)

Since Xu was currently in Britain, which was thousands of miles away from China, he took the opportunity to find his own space, and to try something with which his father would definitely disagree: he dyed part of his hair yellow, and he wore an ear ring on his left ear. Yet Xu was careful to dye his hair back to black and take off his ear ring when his father came to Britain to visit him in May 2006. Xu's behaviour exemplifies his struggle with his father's power in an indirect way.

Lan's father was the only 'bread winner' of the family, who almost managed everything for her. Lan did not mind following her father's decisions all the time. Studying in Britain was one of the decisions that Lan's father made for her future, fully ignoring Lan's voice.

F: How did you decide to study English in the UK?

Lan: My father made the decision. I was good at science, so I didn't do well in the middle-term exam on arts. I was usually one of the top 3 best students in my class, but I couldn't keep the position after I chose to study arts. My father wished I could go to the best university in China, but according to my score, I couldn't go to the best university to study arts, although I had no problem to enter a common university. But he didn't wish so. Then he decided to send me studying abroad.

F: So your father made the decision, and you just accepted it.

Lan: My father firstly said that he would wait for my results of the final-term exam. But two months later, he told me that all the procedures for preparing me to study abroad had been done. (Interview, 08/06/06)

Besides these big issues, Lan's clothes and shoes were bought by her father, who thought the quality of the clothes was most important. Lan got used to wearing the clothes her

father bought to satisfy her father, although many of them looked too mature and too formal for her. However, Lan bought some casual style clothes in Britain. No matter how much she liked the clothes she bought herself, Lan dared not wear them back to China on holiday. Besides the freedom of wearing her favourite clothes in Britain, Lan also gained the right of choosing a British university, in which she would like to further her study, because of her father's limited knowledge of English.

As Lan reported, it was her father who decided the big issues in her life, such as in which discipline and where she should further her study, as well as the small issues in her life, such as which clothes she should wear in China. Lan was passive accepting all of his father's decisions, because she had no role model for challenging her father. In her conversation with me on 17/04/06, Lan described her mother as a totally powerless housewife, who even could not work outside as she wished, because Lan's father thought letting his wife work outside would make him lose face. When Lan came to study English in Britain, the long distance from home provided her optional choice: she could wear the clothes she liked. Furthermore, her improving English language proficiency also brings her the power to make decisions for her own future.

In contrast to Lan, Yin felt very uncomfortable with her father's control. Yin had never left her home before, and her father was very strict, for instance, she could not come back home later than 9pm. As with every little girl growing up, Yin tended to have her own will.

Although my father wished me to do my bachelor's degree in Singapore, he thought I wasn't able to look after myself at that time, as I had seldom been separated from my parents from my childhood. Suddenly, I was eager to study abroad, since they always restricted my behaviour at home. I wanted to go abroad

to see how life looks like without my parents beside me, and to make myself become more mature. (Interview, 14/05/06)

Yin chose to study in Britain to escape from her father's strict control. Her successful living experience in Britain made her father recognise her independent capability, and her opinions started to be considered by her father. It is evident from the data in this subsection that the father's role is very influential to these four Chinese learners: their English learning journeys in Britain are either results of their fathers' direct decisions or their own decisions to fulfil their fathers' expectations. For some of them, the study abroad experience and their improving English competence provided the learners power to challenge their fathers' authority.

4.1.2 'We belong to matrilineal society'

The influence of the mother was also important to some of the Chinese learners. Jin and Fan's mothers had prestige positions in their families. Jin's mother made most decisions in the family. He joked with me that his family 'belongs to a matrilineal society' (Interview, 13/06/06). When Jin was in the Grade Two in high school, his mother gave him two choices: either studying abroad, or migrating to Beijing and then trying to go to Peking University (the name remained although under subsequent political changes, the name of the city was changed to Beijing). Considering the unpopularity of biology in China, the high academic requirement of Peking University, and the long academic length of study in a Chinese university system (four years), Jin chose to further his study in Britain. His

mother supported his decision, and also encouraged him to start his independent life in Britain. Jin's mother was a very pioneering and open woman, who had influenced him a lot with many fresh ideas since his childhood. Jin appreciated his mother's independence and intelligence, and took up his mother's suggestions positively.

Compared to Jin's mother, Fan's mother had absolute power in the family.

My mother makes all the decisions. Although my father has the right to speak, my mother's opinion turned to the final decision automatically. I also have the right to speak, my mother just listens to my opinion, but she has already had her decision. Whatever we say is useless. (Interview, 13/06/06)

Fan respected her mother, while she felt sympathetic, even disparaging about her powerless father.

My father doesn't have any position in the family. My father had his own job before. He once told my mother, 'I would never use your money.' But my mother is too strong. My father resigned his job later, and worked in my mother's company as her assistant. What my father had said turns to be unrealistic things. Whose money is he using now? Although they two earn the money together, there is still some difference. (Interview, 13/06/06)

The above two extracts not only show the unequal power relationship between Fan's mother and father, but also reflects Fan's strong affection for her mother. Fan's life in China was highly influenced by her mother, since she grew up under the control of her mother, and she always walked on the way paved by her mother, who would solve all her problems. Fan's mother had considered sending Fan studying abroad since her middle school, while dramatically, the final decision was made because of an accident.

On that day, I really made my mother angry. My mother scolded me, ‘your room is in a mess, go clean it.’ I said, ‘I will clean it tomorrow.’ My mother thought the reason why my room was always in a mess, and why I always didn’t follow the rule, was that I always relied on my parents in China. Then she broke a bowl and decided to send me to study abroad. She didn’t ask my opinion, and she just informed me after she had finished all the procedures for preparing me to study abroad. (Interview, 13/06/06)

Fan accepted her mother’s arrangement, since study abroad was her dream, which was inspired by her mother’s experience. Fan’s mother went abroad to attend a conference in the US in the early 1990s and stayed there for one year, and Fan found her mother had changed a lot after she came back from the US.

I thought if I went abroad, I would also broaden my view and get some new ideas. I don’t want to become similar to other Chinese, who never change. (Interview, 13/06/06)

In addition, study abroad could free Fan from the great pressure coming from her mother in China.

I was really under great pressure at that moment, and I even couldn’t breathe anymore. When I was in the high school in Beijing, every teacher knew my mother, and I felt my whole life was controlled by my mother. (Interview, 13/06/06)

In the data, I found that the power was distributed unequally to either father or mother in each of the six families. The unequal power relationship between the family members had a direct impact on the six participants’ orientation towards study abroad. The reasons which pushed the six participants into studying in Britain can be summed up as followings: students’ inability to enter the universities as their parents expected; parental ambitions;

and the opportunity for independence and new life experiences. The participants had been adored by their parents both materially and affectively, while at the same time, they felt uncomfortable with their parental control, so the journey of study in Britain provided them an opportunity to find their own spaces to develop independence, besides finishing their study tasks successfully as their parents required. These students' ideologies and practices in Britain continued being influenced by their parents, which will be discussed in the following sections, but in Britain, they started to challenge their fathers/mothers' authority. Although their gestures are still small, like Xu's dyeing his hair, and Lan's wearing the causal style clothes, it is significant as a beginning. It is also important to point out that the English study abroad experience and improving English competence gave them the confidence and power to make decisions for their own lives.

4.2 Gendered self-image and gendered agency

According to my conversations with the six participants, I can see the significant impact of the parents' gender roles on the participants' gendered self-images. As I will demonstrate in this section, the participants used their parents' character as a model, and chose to imitate their fathers' character, like Zhu and Xu; or adopted some aspects of their parents' character, like Jin and Fan; or resisted their mothers' character, like Lan and Yin. For example, Zhu portrayed himself as a man, who had ambition and ideals; and who was loyal and supportive to his friends and his girlfriend. Zhu escaped from his life in Chongqing, and came to Britain for an exchange of what he perceived as an unpromising life.

After spending two years in Chongqing, I felt fed up with playing around, and I felt my life didn't have any rule or any goal. I couldn't continue my life like this. My life will be meaningless if I don't pursue anything. My dream does not like this. (Interview, 03/06/06)

Having been in Britain for a year, Zhu shaped his dream of becoming financially successful.

Zhu: Last night, my friend asked me, if I won 18,000,000 pounds on the lottery, what I would do. I told him that I would finish my study in Britain, my short-term goal firstly, and then go back to China. I will work in a company for a few years to gain some working experience, and then I will run my own business...My goal is not as few as 18,000,000 pounds...

F: What's your goal?

Zhu: I wanted to be one of the top 10 richest people in China. This is my long-term goal. (Interview, 03/06/06)

Zhu's short-term goal, to be successful in his studies and to improve his English in Britain, appears to be a starting point for realising his long-term goal, to become one of the 'top 10 richest people' in China. However, Zhu is not only motivated, but also constrained by his long-term goal, as he said later in the interview,

Sometimes, the great goal makes me feel annoyed, because you always think about the long-term goal, and ignore the short-term goal...You always think about what you should do in the future, how you can make money in the future, but if you can't solve the current problem, how can you think about the future? I always think about this, and I feel very annoyed. Sometimes, I am quite depressed. (Interview, 03/06/06)

This extract shows Zhu's struggle between his current goal, to be successful in his English

language learning, and his future goal, to become a successful entrepreneur. Zhu feels determined to continue his study in Britain, but at the same time, he is suffering in the learning process and stay in Britain.

Another male participant, Xu viewed himself as a determined traditional man, who was also eager for success.

Everyone wants to be successful, and I am not an exception. But different people have different definition of success. My expectation is not very high. I want to have my own career, and I will be excellent in the area. I should be able to look after my family, my parents, and my children. This is a successful man. My idea might be traditional, but my parents have contributed a lot to me. (Interview, 24/05/06)

Here, one sees that to be a successful Chinese man, or perhaps for any man, the issues are about career, financial success, and family. This image is repeated in Jin's description.

A typical Chinese man should only have one wife, want to study in a good university, and earn money to buy a house and a car for his wife...a typical Chinese man wants a stable life, and he always end up with a stable family and having a child. (Interview, 27/05/06)

Zhu and Xu fall into Jin's description of 'a typical Chinese man' more or less, and they two are constrained by the family responsibility and social expectation. Xu also considered being a man meant that he had to take more responsibility than a woman, as he once complained to me after a whole-day tiring English schooling, 'I would like to be a woman, then my life wouldn't be so hard, and I don't need to make so much effort' (Talk with Xu, 04/04/06).

In contrast to Zhu and Xu, who had a masculine and traditional self-images, Jin had an

idea of becoming a different man.

The time is changing, young people don't see these as important things, they are free, and they enjoy their lives...I want to have a very successful career before I get married. I will firstly enjoy my life before achieving success...I will complete my dream before having a child, and then think about the family. (Interview, 27/05/06)

Jin appears egocentric and wants to live in a way that would put himself first. However, this may also be an indication of the impact of staying in the UK and the changing of his ideas.

As for the female participant, Lan's gendered self-image was opposite to her mother, who was 'a traditional Chinese woman, spending most of time doing housework at home, sending my younger brother to school, and helping my younger brother studying at night' (Interview, 08/06/06). Lan thought her mother's life was boring, and she wanted to have her own career instead of becoming a housewife, although from our conversations and my observation of her behaviour, I found her to be conservative compared to her three Chinese classmates. Fan also thought economic independence was crucial for a woman.

I want to be independent in future, and firstly independent in economy; I wouldn't use other's money. I want to use the money I earn...If I grasp my money in my hands, I grasp my fate in my hands. (Interview, 13/06/06)

This is about the relationship between money and power. From my own experience as a young woman educated in China, I can see that this point of view reflects Fan's material Marxism education background in China. In addition, Fan realised that power can also be a burden.

I don't want to become a woman like my mother, who is too strong, because a very strong woman is not good. My mother is too tired. The whole family and company rely on her. My mother is perfect, but she is too tired. I don't want to be so tired. I also don't want to be so perfect, since it's not necessary. (Interview, 13/06/06)

Fan mentioned 'my mother' 55 times in our one hour and 12 minutes interview, which gave me a strong impression that Fan really admired her mother, however, she did not want to be like her mother. There is a tension compounded by the fact she was on her own in the UK, having to make her own decisions on what kind of woman she wanted to be.

In contrast to Lan and Fan, Yin thought women could live without careers as a marker of success.

If a woman loses her job, it's very normal. Have you ever heard the middle-aged women gossiping, 'that woman is useless, as she lost her job'? You just heard them gossiping, 'that woman's husband is useless, because he lost his job'. (Interview, 14/05/06)

When I firstly heard this opinion in an informal conversation, I asked her, 'if you just want to be a housewife, why do you come to Britain to do a master's degree?' Yin argued with me immediately, 'men can't bear female partners who are more excellent than them. They would prefer to find one who is less excellent. But study abroad is more important for my future, since men are not reliable' (Talk with Yin, 11/11/05). In Chinese tradition, the husband does not want the wife to become more educated than they are. Yin was trying to find a balance between becoming a woman dependant on men and an independent woman, and as Yin put it, 'I don't mind becoming the breadwinner in my future family, but I have

to make my husband feel confident' (Talk with Yin, 11/11/05)

Gender, as a system of social relations and discursive practices, may influence second language learners' decision-making processes, and as a result, their learning outcome (Pavlenko and Piller, 2001). Zhu and Xu's aim of becoming ambitious, successful, and responsible men became the agent that pushed them into continuing their study in the language school even when they found the learning and living experiences in Britain unappealing. Similar to the female Japanese students in Kobayashi's (2002) study, Lan and Fan considered study in Britain as a way of seeking independent life, and challenging the confines of gender patriarchy in their original culture. Yin's case was more complicated than other participants. Although she chose to further her study in Britain for her own future, she feared the association of a woman's academic success with negative social consequences.

4.3 An example of the impact of gendered agency on SLL: Finding a girlfriend in Britain

Pavlenko and Piller (2001) suggest that gender relations between men and women may motivate individuals to learn or use a second language. This section will illustrate how English practice occurs in Jin and Xu's experiences of seeking girlfriends. Jin was very popular in his secondary school in China, because of his good looks. He was titled as 'school grass' — the most handsome boy in the whole school. Jin was parted from his ex-girlfriend before he came to Britain as he was going to spend a long period of time in

Britain. Since Jin felt very lonely and bored in Britain, he wanted to find a girlfriend for company. Jin approached several English girls in the public school he studied, and a South Korean girl in Crawley Language School, but failed to build up the relationship because of the age gap. Then Jin tried to find a girlfriend from the internet, such as Yahoo Personal, which did not work for him either. When Jin talked about this experience to me in the interview on 27/05/06, he told me, 'I have high expectations, so it's not easy for me to find a suitable girlfriend. I feel stable now, and I will think about this at my university.'

Driven by the goal of finding a girlfriend to make the life in Britain more interesting and cheerful, Jin used English language to approach the girls from different countries in both face to face and internet contexts. If 'finding a girlfriend' is considered as a language learning task in a real context, English functions as a meaningful tool to deliver Jin's proposal, communicate with different girls, and find the difference between expectation and real situation.

Xu also practised a similar task to make his life in Britain more interesting. During the break time on 21 February 2006, Xu was editing a text message in the common room, and then showed it to me,

F: 'Do you believe in predetermined relationships?' What's this? An advertisement?

Xu: No, I'm chasing a Korean girl in our school. Sending English text messages made me crazy.

F: Which girl?

Xu: The Korean girl you met in last class.

F: But I didn't find you fancying her.

Xu: I didn't, I even have no special feeling to her.

F: Then, why do you chase her?

Xu: Since life is boring here, and she will go back to South Korea, and I will go back to China in June, we will separate naturally, and it will cause no problem.

...

F: It might be good for you to practise your English, since you can't speak Korean, and she can't speak Chinese. You two have to communicate in English.

Xu: Yes. I feel confident that the Korean girl will become my girl friend sooner or later. I am enjoying the process of chasing her. (Talk with Xu, 21/02/06)

Compared to Jin, Xu has similar reasons for finding a girlfriend, but a less serious attitude. I felt Xu treated the issue of finding a girlfriend as a game to vary his life in Britain, which was perfectly free from responsibility. At the same time, he practised English through sending English text messages, writing English emails, and talking with the girl in English to achieve his purpose. Jin and Xu's motivation of forming relationships with girls results in their engagement in meaningful interaction in English. This demonstrates that gendered agency may lead to investment in second language learning and use.

4.4 Gendered access to linguistic resources and interaction opportunities

According to Ehrlich (1997, p. 436), 'individuals construct or produce themselves as women or men by habitually engaging in social practices that are associated with culturally and community-defined notions of masculinity and femininity'. This view suggests Chinese learners' participations in various social activities in Britain are always associated with their own senses of gendered selves. For example, in Jin's mind, girls were more helpless and emotional than boys. He told me that Chinese girls usually had more difficulties in staying in Britain, since they were easily influenced by outside factors. Therefore, friends were more important to girls, especially Chinese friends, so that they

could share common interests. This gender difference not only influenced their life styles, but also influenced their access to interaction opportunities, as Jin clarified,

I think boys learn English more quickly than girls. Because boys will try to learn new things, like playing new TV games, making new friends, drinking in the pub, or trying to speak. Girls prefer stable lives, and they spend every day peacefully. Girls have fewer chances to speak. You can see this from the frequency that girls speak in the class. Girls' academic English should improve very quickly, but their speaking and listening are not as good as boys. (Interview, 27/05/06)

From Jin's description of gender differences between Chinese boys and girls in Britain, the priority of being a young man and the consequent advantage of accessing linguistic resources are exemplified. Jin presents a positive male figure, who is calm, strong, determined, and intelligent, as well as an active English learner. This also reflects Jin's perception of himself as a male student, the virtues he has or he wants to have.

Fan agreed with Jin that girls were more emotional than boys, who behaved more reasonably.

Girls like to think about many things, and they are easily influenced by others compared to boys. They will think for a long time just because of one sentence others speak. Girls care more about their faces. Boys are more careless, and wouldn't think so much. Girls are very considerate, and they think others' words can hurt them. Boys don't have this feeling. (Interview, 13/06/06)

As girls were perceived to have a tendency to be more emotional, Fan thought boys should have simpler lives in Britain. However, Fan did not think this tendency would influence girls' English learning experiences in Britain much, instead, she felt more irritated about parents' different attitudes towards boys and girls studying abroad.

Parents control girls more than boys. Parents think what should a girl do if something happens to her, since she is abroad by herself? Many of my mother's friends said, 'Girls should go abroad after they finish their universities, because they have boyfriends at that time, and they can go abroad with their boyfriends.' Girls need protection, but it's unnecessary to find a boyfriend to go abroad. I don't like this. (Interview, 13/06/06)

Parents' intention of putting girls in a more insecure position than boys constrains girls' participation in social activities in Britain. Being a female student, Lan also felt more restricted in communicating with native speakers compared to a male student. As she put it,

The pub is very noisy, and I don't like that place quite much. If I want to go there, I don't know whom I can go with. If I go there, I don't want to go with my classmates, since it's very boring to spend the whole day with the same people. But if I were a male student, I might feel easy to go to pub and communicate with others. I might not like to stay at home, and I would go to some noisy places initially. So boys have more chances to practise English. (Interview, 08/06/06)

Yin gave a very similar comment on gender difference in accessing linguistic resources in pub,

I think boys have more advantages in studying in the UK. It's normal for boys to go to pub, but I think it's not good for girls to go to pub, maybe it's because I am quite traditional. Since the pub is the most traditional occasion in the UK, boys can get to know more about the local culture there. They can improve their English by chatting with others. (Interview, 14/05/06)

Yin thought boys and girls were equal in performance in the classroom, although boys had more opportunities in practising English outside of the classroom, and furthermore, these opportunities were influenced by their own personalities.

Some girls are outgoing, and they like to play around. If the boy is shy, he wouldn't try to find chances to practise his English after class, and he even wouldn't find the chance to practise in the class. So I think this is quite related to a person's personality. (Interview, 14/05/06)

Conversely, Zhu thought women had more opportunity of interacting with native speakers, since 'men here are very enthusiastic towards women, and they will communicate with women initially. But women won't communicate with men initially' (Interview, 03/06/06). Here, Zhu positioned men as disadvantaged English learners in terms of his perception of British men's general enthusiastic attitudes towards women.

The various quotes illustrate that male and female Chinese learners' access to linguistic resources and interaction opportunities are gender structured differently, but not in a simple binary way. Fan and Lan thought male students had more chances to interact with native English speakers in public places, such as the pub, mainly because of security concerns. In addition, Yin pointed out that personal characteristics also influence second language learners' interaction with native speakers. She felt reluctant to go to the pub to seek a chance to practise her English, since she considered that going to the pub conflicted with her traditional gendered image. In contrast to the female students' opinions, Zhu suggested male native English speakers would initiate a conversation with Chinese women, while Chinese men would not be treated in a similar way by female native English speakers. As a result, Chinese female learners gained more opportunities to communicate with native English speakers. In conclusion, it seems that there is a gender difference between female Chinese learners' and male Chinese learners' access to linguistic resources

in Britain, however, their interaction opportunities are also co-constructed by the learner's own gendered image, personality, and the native English interlocutors' character. This evidence might suggest, as Pavlenko (2001c) states, there is no linguistic behaviour or practice that can be universally associated with male or female second language learners.

4.5 Gendered interaction in the classroom

There are two main approaches to the study of gender and classroom interaction in SLL: to examine the differences in the amount and quality of talk between men and women; and to investigate not only who is talking, but also who has the opportunity to talk, and the right to define the meaning of the talk, and who remains invisible (Pavlenko, 2004; Sunderland, 2004). In terms of the disadvantage of the first approach, which has been discussed in Section 2.5, the following discussion will address the second approach, and look at classroom interaction within a critical framework from the following perspectives: how the six participants respond to the teachers' presentation of gender-related topics, sex-related issues, and homosexual topics in the classroom; and how the female students challenge men's masculine displays. Then, an example of Zhu's discursive gendered practice in the classroom will be presented. Implications of these data will also be discussed in each subsection.

4.5.1 Teacher-student talk on gender-related topics

From the data, it is evident that gender-related topics are used frequently in the language class to bring out productive discussion, as students seem willing to discuss the topic in relation to their own experiences and state their opinions according to their own gendered agendas. Interesting and familiar gender-related topics appear to motivate students to participate in the discussion actively. For instance, in the Elementary English Course on 22/11/05, Alda, the British Filipino teacher, introduced the topic on how to date.

(Mehmet is a male Turkish student.)

Alda: We are going to talk about 'date'. Since Xu has talked about romance all this morning, Xu, imagine your dream comes true. Tomorrow, a nice girl will come to this classroom, and sit next to you, instead of Mehmet. You want to date her, what would you like to say?

Mehmet: I love you.

Xu: Come on, baby!

Alda: You must be polite; you firstly introduce yourself to her, and then invite her to a cinema, or a restaurant.

Xu: A hotel.

Alda: Oh, come on.

Xu: Would you like to go to the cinema with me?

Alda: Or 'are you interested in going out for a meal with me?' Or 'do you want to go out with me tonight?' On the second day, you two are friends now, you can say, 'how about dinner tonight at my place?' You can cook at home.

Xu: I don't know how to cook. (Observation: audio recordings, 22/11/05)

The topic of 'dating' has successfully caught the young students' interests, as learning how to date in a proper way in Britain meets their personal needs directly (see Section 4.3). Alda then continued introducing three ways of making invitations in different contexts naturally. What the students learnt here was not only the form of English language on how to invite someone to a meal, but also about how to behave, to go on a date in Britain. The above conversation suggests that gender-related topics can produce speaking opportunities,

create comfortable and interesting discourse, and introduce different gender ideologies as well as knowledge of English.

Students and teachers' diverse backgrounds often result in different sorts of engagement influenced by alternative systems of knowledge, values, beliefs and modes of gender performance (Norton and Pavlenko, 2004b). Teacher's ignorance of these differences may lead to miscommunication in the English language classroom. In the class of 14/12/05, Sandra, the female English teacher, set up a task to teach the students how to write a conclusion to an essay. She gave the students the title, 'The causes and effects of the breakdown in the traditional family structure in the UK over the last decade', and the outline of this essay. The students were required to write a conclusion. Fan and Kim (a female South Korean student), and Lan and Ke (a female Chinese student) were writing the conclusion in pairs, and Zhu was writing alone. Fan and Kim, and Zhu thought that more career women putting off getting married was the main reason for the breakdown in the traditional family structure in UK, and would have an effect on the society. Sandra tried hard to persuade them that single-parent family and same-sex partnership would bring more negative effects to the society compared to unmarried career women, and presented some statistics, which showed that more children of single-parent families tended to commit crime than the children of normal families. However, Fan and Zhu still felt confused in the end.

In this case, I would suggest that communication is blocked because the teacher has assumed that her Chinese students have similar knowledge about single-parent families and same-sex partnerships as she does. In reality, single-parent families and same-sex

partnerships are still not publicly accepted in China, so it is difficult for young Chinese students to imagine which effect these phenomena will bring to the society. 'Unmarried career women' are becoming a more common phenomena in China, and that is why the Chinese students put it as a reason for breaking up the traditional family structure. Sandra ignores the stage of introducing a British view point on single-families and same-sex partnerships, and fails to ask the students their views. Thus it is not unexpected to see the loss in communication. Since people's gender identities are always culturally embedded (Norton and Pavlenko, 2004a), the British teacher and the Chinese students can have very different gender ideology or gender value.

Since some language teachers tend to acknowledge the gendered nature of interaction outside the classroom, and use Britain as the central reference point, they might likely be trapped within their own cultural paradigms and reflect the very forms of cultural imperialism. It is important to acknowledge the students' multiple identities, create an atmosphere of mutual respect in the language classroom, and develop multi-voiced consciousness (Pavlenko, 2004). In a mixed-cultural classroom, I recommend language teachers to build up the bridge to cross the culture gap before using gender-related topics to practise different language learning tasks.

4.5.2 Teacher-student talk on sex-related issues

The knowledge of the dominant discourse of sexuality in a particular culture is crucial for language teachers, since it decides whether a particular utterance is polite and acceptable or

rude and unacceptable (Pavlenko, 2004). The lack of such knowledge may lead to negative outcome relating to SLL as is illustrated in following extracts. In the class on 28/04/06, the topic of abortion was brought out in Mali's presentation,

(Mali is a female Thai student; Kate is a female English teacher.)

Mali: Do you think it's right or wrong for abortion?

Jin, Zhu: It depends.

Jin: Especially for a young mother, who is not able to bring up a child.

Zhu: For example, if you make love, and the condom breaks up, the woman gets pregnant, and she really doesn't want to have the child, she can abort.

Kate: But if you make love, you should think about this, and take the responsibility.

Zhu: But it's the condom company's responsibility.

Kate: I don't agree with you, I will argue with you later. (Observation: field notes, 28/04/06)

This conversation started with a social topic, but as the discussion moved on, Zhu and Kate began to talk about 'make love' and 'use condom', which were expressions using sexual language. I observed that the other students from Thailand, China, United Arab Emirates, and Libya in the classroom felt uncomfortable about participating in the following discussion, and chose to keep silent, as the terms used by Zhu and Kate seemed not to be commonly acceptable by them.

It is necessary to notice that even students from similar cultural backgrounds will react to the same sexual expression variously in terms of their own gendered selves. For example, in the class of 22/05/06, Matt, a male English teacher was teaching the students how to pronounce the phonetic symbol [r],

(Lin is a female Chinese student.)

Matt: Many students, especially Japanese students and Korean students, have problems on pronouncing [r]. I like to teach this sound, it sounds like kiss. Ok, give me a kiss.

(The students made the sound of kiss one by one. Yin did it quite well.)

Lin: It is very stupid. (She looked quite embarrassed)

After class, I talked with Yin,

F: How did you feel when Matt asked you to 'kiss' him?

Yin: I felt it's fine.

F: Not embarrassed?

Yin: Sort of getting used to.

F: So Matt has done the similar practice many times?

Yin: Not many, but several times. It's normal for the teachers here to joke with something that we would never do in China, like sex-related topics. If you don't mind, you can play with this, and practise well. If you do mind, you can't practise your English on these occasions. I don't care. (Observation: field notes, 22/05/06)

Both Yin and Lin were Chinese female students, but they had different attitudes towards conducting this task: Yin did as the teacher required naturally and happily; while Lin felt embarrassed to finish the task.

The diversity of students' gender identities require language teachers to deal with sex-related issues in a sensitive manner, otherwise, conflicts will occur in the classroom. The following extract is about Lan's unhappy experience in the class on 01/11/05, since she could not accept the example given by Carl, the male English teacher. The story was told by Jin,

In that class, Carl was giving an example to explain the phrase 'cut off'. He said, 'I was walking in the dessert, suddenly I saw Aladdin's Spirit Lamp, he asked me what my wish was. I wished my penis would become long enough to touch the floor. Then the Allah Spirit Lamp "cut off" my legs, and my penis touched the floor'. Lan said, 'I can't believe a teacher will talk about this in the class'. Carl's face turned to red immediately, and he said, 'I'm sorry'. (Talk with Jin, 02/11/05)

Obviously, this example failed to realise the English language teaching purpose, and ended up with embarrassment, since this sex-related example embarrassed Lan's gender identity, who considered it was an unsuitable issue to talk by a teacher in the classroom. On the other hand, Jin, Zhu and Fan accepted this example, and thought it unnecessary to take it seriously. As international students in Britain, Jin, Zhu and Fan chose to trust Carl, the native teacher, whose behaviour was perceived as being the norm, and assumed this sex-related example must be accepted as normal in the language classroom in Britain. In order to behave similarly to British people, these three Chinese learners tended to accept the teacher's example, and considered themselves as more civilised persons than Lan. They criticised Lan for being too conservative and serious, whose behaviour caused the embarrassment of the English teacher. The four Chinese learners' various attitudes in this case illustrate cultural difference, gender difference, as well as individual difference in the students' perceptions.

After checking with several TESOL professionals in my department, I feel certain that Carl's sex-related example is not commonly seen as acceptable in a language classroom environment in Britain. I tell this story, not because I want to blame the particular teacher personally, but because it helps raise awareness of the importance of presenting sex-related issues in the English language classroom in a careful and serious way. This unacceptable sexual anecdote had a negative impact on all the four Chinese learners. Lan started to dislike the language teacher. In the following weeks, I observed that Lan appeared to resist Carl's class: she was not willing to answer questions, and she tended to be silent in the class. As a consequence, Carl tried to keep a definite distance from Lan, and he treated

other students with more camaraderie and gave them more encouragement than he did to Lan. For Jin, Zhu and Fan, they were following an inappropriate linguistic and behavioural role model without any awareness.

This example illustrates how a language teacher's lack of knowledge and respect for individual student's perspective on gender identity may possibly lead to miscommunication, cessation of learning, embarrassing atmosphere, resentment and resistance to the language teacher and the target language. The English language classroom represents a unique space, in which different languages and cultures meet each other. This particular classroom offers English language teachers opportunities to engage with cross-cultural differences and the various social constructions of gender and sexuality, and thus help students develop linguistic and intercultural competence, and multi-voiced consciousness; however, it also requires English language teachers to be well-prepared to handle controversial topics, questions, or comments on gender and sexuality to maintain positive dynamics in the classroom (Norton and Pavlenko, 2004b).

4.5.3 Teacher-student talk on homosexuality topics

Since the early 1990s, English language teaching has started to address both homosexuality and heterosexism in the profession and in the classroom, recognising that not all students and their interlocutors are necessarily heterosexually inclined, and what students say, read, and think about may not only pertain to heterosexual people (Nelson, 2004). To integrate gay and lesbian themes and perspectives into second language teaching

resources might raise students' consciousness about cultural relativity in interpretations of homosexual affections displays.

Although same-sex public affection displays are acceptable in many countries, such as Britain, they are perceived negatively in China. Homosexual behaviour was only identified as non-criminal activity by law in China in 1997. It is estimated that there are 30,000,000 homosexuals in China, but most of them are hidden (Pu and Li, 2005). Constrained by traditional Chinese customs, homosexuality has not been publicly accepted till now. Thus, when the topic of homosexuality is mentioned as a social issue in the English language classroom, it is a totally fresh experience for Chinese learners, who can talk about homosexual topics in a formal public place. In the class of 28/02/06, Xu showed his curiosity on how to categorise gay people,

(Storm is a female British American teacher; Mehemt is a male Turkish student.)

Storm: Did you have a reservation? Sir or Madam? Sir for man, and Madam for woman.

Xu: How about gay?

Storm: You don't ask people, 'are you a gay?'

Mehemt: How about others?

Storm: People have different sexual orientation, some are heterosexual, some are homosexual, some are transsexual, and some are bisexual, although this is very rare.

(Observation: field notes, 28/02/06)

Xu's question seems to be a bit annoying, but I can see how a young student has fun with the previous perceived taboo topic in a formal classroom setting. The following discussion of 28/04/06 was more serious, when Lan was assigned to do a presentation on 'Same sex marriage'. After her presentation, Lan had a discussion with other students and the teacher.

(Khalid is a male Libyan student; Kate is a female English teacher.)

Lan: What do you think about same sex marriage?

Zhu: People have the right to marry the people they want.

Jin: Yes.

Khalid: As an Islamite, I don't agree. I think it's against the nature of human beings.

...

Lan: One new right is about pension.

Jin: What's pension?

Kate: When a gay couple are getting old, let's say 70s. One died, and the other one couldn't have his pension. But for heterosexual couples, they can. Nowadays, the law has changed, a same sex couple also has the right. (Observation: field notes, 28/04/06)

This extract exemplifies how the language teacher introduces British mainstream attitudes towards homosexuality to the students, and how the students react to the attitudes. However, my observation outside the classroom suggests what the students say in the classroom may not always truly reflect what they believe in. Zhu chose to show a positive attitude towards same sex marriage in the language classroom, which was contradicted to the complaint he had made when we chatted together after class eleven days earlier, 'I watched a movie from the TV last night, it's about two gay people, and it's really disgusting.' Zhu's opinion given in the class revealed his intention of adapting to mainstream British ideology on homosexuality, which was generally considered more civilised. Zhu felt comfortable discussing the topic of homosexuality in the language classroom positively with his imagination, while his traditional and masculine gender identity made it difficult for him to accept the practice of homosexuality in real life. The classroom plays the role of introducing students to 'imaginary worlds' of other languages where gender and sexuality may be constructed and performed differently than in their own

culture. The language classroom, where the students come together from a variety of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds to learn a second language constitutes a unique setting for exposing social and cultural underpinnings of sexuality categories (Pavlenko, 2004).

As the Chinese learners encounter homosexual issues from media, and from their interaction with local people in Britain (see Jin's experience in Section 4.6.2), the discussion of these issues in the language classroom may give rise to uncertainties, mismatched expectations, and a deeper consideration of the roots of homophobic attitudes. Pavlenko (2004) suggests that introducing homosexual issues to the second language classroom offers students an opportunity to recognise and acknowledge existing gender discourses, and to explore alternative gender discourses, and different sexual identities. O'Loughlin (2001) also argues that teachers should expose students to multiple 'gender roles and behaviours' they are likely to encounter in the new country, and help them make choices about 'what is appropriate for their own lives' (p. 39-40).

4.5.4 Challenging masculine displays

Language teachers and students are gendered individuals, and their beliefs and practices associated with masculinity or femininity or some mixture thereof affect their interaction with each other (Ehrlich, 1997). For example, In the class of 09/03/06, Carl, a male English teacher, tried to explain 'seek', he wrote down 'woman, 28, seeks tall dark and handsome man... who is very rich' on the whiteboard,

Fan: You can also see 'men seek for women' in the newspaper.

Carl: Don't be feminist, we have four to four. OK. (writing 'man' above 'woman')

(Observation: field notes, 09/03/06)

One might argue that Fan spoke out to challenge Carl's example, as it stereotyped women as relying on men, which irritated Fan's sense of herself as an independent woman (see Section 4.2). While her request to describe men and women in an equal way by using the evidence from the local newspaper was identified by the teacher as feminist and an overreaction. Carl's jokey tone made Fan feel uneasy, and she kept silent for the rest of the class. This extract shows a conflict between a male language teacher and a female student caused by the male teacher's representation of the stereotyped relationship between men and women. It also raises awareness of negative impact of language teachers' gender bias.

Besides the interaction between the language teacher and the student, the interaction between students also tends to become problematic with respect to male practice of masculinity. When Yin met a South Korean student, Jong, in the language classroom, she found it difficult to get on with him because of his masculine attitude and behaviour. In group work, Jong liked to direct the discussion, and he would stop others if someone interrupted him. For example, Yin was in the same group with Jong, Seo, a female South Korean student, and Lin, a female Chinese student to do the task of filming an introduction to the city tour on 10/02/06. Jong was in charge of the camera, and behaved as the acting director, who gave orders all the time. Yin complained of his behaviour in the following diary entry.

February 11, 2006

An extreme perfect pursuing South Korean man

The teacher assigned us to do video field work — to film an introduction to the city tour. Our group had three girls and one boy. The South Korean boy was so masculine, that I really wanted to kick him out. In order to get a perfect screen effect, he arranged every scene and angle carefully, and he let us three girls stand in the cold wind for more than half an hour. We were so cold, that our faces turned white. He didn't feel regretful, and still pursued his perfect scene. Because of repeated filming, the battery ran out when it came to my turn... as a result, I had to go out with him in the afternoon to finish the task of our group. [annoying x-x]

...

My final conclusion is: this man is an extremely professional perfectionist, and he has a male chauvinism. (Yin's diary, 11/02/06)

Yin's diary entry describes that Jong is a dominant masculine person. This is also evident in the following discussion on 'Men – would you consider being a house husband and stay at home to look after the house and kids? Why/ why not?',

(Jiang is a male Chinese student; Seo is a female South Korean student.)

Jiang: If I am the breadwinner, I will do nothing at home.

Yin: How about if your wife earns more money?

Jiang: I will do more housework.

Yin: But I think many men can't bear this.

Seo: I heard a lot of husbands do housework in China.

Yin: It depends. Some men are very powerful, and they also want to be bosses at home, especially men working as managers.

Jiang: Yeah, that's what I think.

Yin: To be a woman, I would like to have a job. If unfortunately, I divorce with my husband, I still have money to look after my children.

Jiang: If women earn more money, they can be bosses at home.

Yin: I don't want to be a boss in my family. I think it's man's job.

...

Jong: I would like to work hard, and let my wife stay at home. (Observation: audio recordings, 10/03/06)

The four students' active contributions vividly show their perceptions of stereotyped gender roles in the family. Yin and Jong had contradictory opinions as to whether women should have their own careers after marriage. From Yin's diary above, we can see Yin disagrees about Jong's male chauvinism. In my following classroom observation with Yin, I noticed that she tried not to sit next to Jong in the classroom, so that she could avoid doing pair work with Jong.

The above two cases show gender as a cultural influence on how teacher and students interact. Both the male teacher, Carl, and the male student, Jong, seemed to rarely care how their own gendered behaviour in the classroom affected other female students' motivation to participate in the class. As Vandrick (2000, p. 19-20) calls for attention to 'the needs and learning styles of females as well as to the problems of sexual harassment and stereotyping that harm female students', language teachers need to be critically aware of how men's masculine displays affect the interaction in the classroom and the learning that takes place there.

4.5.5 Zhu's discursive gendered practices in the classroom

In the field of SLL, theorists always try to explain why learners sometimes are motivated, introverted and confident, while sometimes are unmotivated, introverted and anxious; why learners sometimes speak and at other times remain silent (Norton, 2000). The following part attempts to explain Zhu's ambivalent desire to learn and practise English in the classroom from a gender identity perspective.

Zhu preferred British English, because 'it's the English for gentlemen' (Interview, 03/06/06). When Zhu was required to do pair work or group work with other classmates, he was always unwilling to talk. For instance, in the class of 21/11/05, Kate, an English female teacher, required the students to discuss the answers of a reading task about the parents' and teacher's attitudes towards a young girl's bullying behaviour in a primary school in England. Zhu basically just listened to Lan during the pair work, so he was not able to answer Kate's question.

Kate: Have you discussed question No.4 and No.5?

Zhu: We have finished.

Kate: Can you tell Jin what you have discussed? (Jin was late, because of his headache, so he didn't know what was going on.)

Zhu: Come on, Lan. (Observation: field notes, 21/11/05)

This extract exemplifies Zhu's lack of motivation to participate in classroom discussion. Zhu did not speak in the class actively, except when the topic really interested him, because his oral English did not allow him to express himself freely. Zhu had a great interest in economics, politics and history, which are generally considered as men's favourite topics. In the class of 16/02/06, Sandra, the English teacher showed a picture of a man who is holding a gun,

Sandra: What do you think? Is it legal to have a gun in China?

Zhu: It's impossible.

Sandra: In England, when people get gun permits, they can have guns.

Fan: I remember once the government decided to ban guns. Before that, our family had two guns for shooting birds.

Jin: I think the gun shouldn't be banned.

Sandra: Why?

Jin: I think everyone should have the right to get a licence to hold a gun.

Sandra: How about the age limitation?

Jin: Older than 21.

Zhu: I think guns should be banned. In America, people can have guns, which results into more crimes. Last year, an Indian boy was killed by a gun holder. In China, we have a big population; people will shoot each other if they have guns. (Observation: audio recordings, 16/02/06)

Compared to the previous conversation, Zhu expressed his opinion supported by historical and objective evidence. His argument was organised in a logical and persuasive way. Zhu behaves differently in the two class conversations according to his interest and his knowledge. The topic on whether guns should be banned or not appears to be more attractive to Zhu compared to the topic on a primary school girl's bullying behaviour. To satisfy his interest, Zhu bought 'The News of the World' and 'The Sun' regularly to keep aware of the current big issues in Britain. Zhu also treated this as an enjoyable way to improve his reading skills in English. This habit pushed Zhu into speaking out in the class sometimes. In the class of 9 March 2006, Carl, a male English teacher, tried to explain the word, 'haul',

Carl: What has happened recently?

Zhu: 53 million pounds were stolen.

Carl: 4 million pounds have been found, so it's a little 'haul'. The police offers '2 million pounds' to people who provide information. What will you do if the thief is your friend? Are you going to call?

Fan: No.

Lan: It's hard to say. The situation is not realistic.

Jin: No.

Zhu: Depends on how close the relationship is.

Carl: Suppose it's your brother's friend.

Zhu: No, I don't want to put my brother in danger. (Observation: field notes, 09/03/06)

Zhu's knowledge on the current issues in Britain allowed him to answer the teacher's question. I found that Zhu was not afraid of speaking English in the class, but always lacked interest. His motivation, investment, choice and opinion were highly influenced by his gendered self. Teutsch-Dwyer (2001) suggests that men are usually under pressure to constitute themselves as masculine linguistically by avoiding forms of talk which primarily associate with women, Zhu might feel the need to perform masculinity by avoiding those discussions on the topics perceived to be associated with femininity, such as girls' bully behaviour; while participating in those discussions on the topics perceived to be associated with masculinity, such as guns and robbery.

4.6 Negotiation of gender identity in various contexts

So far in this chapter, I have discussed how the six Chinese learners' gender identities influence their agency in SLL, their access to interaction opportunities, and their discursive practices in the language classroom. I am now going to look at how these Chinese learners' senses of gender identity and identification are challenged and transformed in the new country and new culture, and how they find a balance between their own gendered values and the gendered behaviour and attitudes they need to show in Britain.

4.6.1 Adapting to new gendered behaviour and values

Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004b, p. 20) suggest that the negotiation of identities will take

place only when a person's certain identities are contested. When Chinese learners come to Britain, a very different society from China, they will naturally perceive the different gendered ideologies and phenomena in the language classroom (see Section 4.5) as well as in the social context outside the language classroom. They may engage with alternative gender discourses and beliefs in the target language community. Being second language learners, they are willing to learn about, and at times, to adapt to new gendered speech acts, behaviour and values (Pavlenko, 2004). For instance, after Jin had been in Britain for two months, his hair appeared to be quite long. Jin consulted his teacher at the beginning of a class about getting a haircut.

(Carl is a male English teacher.)

Jin: Where can I get my hair cut?

Carl: How much do you want to spend on your hair?

Jin: Thirty pounds.

Fan: I don't think your two Taiwanese friends want to spend so much on haircuts.

Carl: If you want something very different, you go to a bit more expensive men haircut shop.

Jin: A particular men haircut shop?

Carl: You want your hair cut by women?

Jin: No.

Carl: It's a very traditional thing in England. Men cut hair for men, and women cut hair for women. (Observation: field notes, 14/11/05)

In this case, Jin suddenly realised that the gendered rule in haircutting in England was different from China, where men can get their haircut either by male or female hairdressers. Jin chose to accept the new rules, and then practised the new rule as a way to establish the similarity between the native male teacher and himself. Jin's behaviour seems to suggest that the students may be subject to native teachers' ideas, sometimes stereotyped ideas, and

they might have little opportunity for alternative views due to their limited interaction with native speakers outside the language school.

Sometimes, Jin made use of the new gendered rules he acquired in Britain as a strategy to fulfil his own will, which could be found in the following conversation between Jin and his female Chinese classmate in Crawley Language School, Ke, in the break time.

Ke: You have to return the eight pounds.

Jin: I have already bought several lunches for you.

Ke: You are a gentleman; you should be more generous and pay lunches for me.

Jin: But we are now in England, so we have to split the bill, you pay half and I pay the other half for lunches. (Observation: field notes, 05/12/05)

From a traditional view, men are still expected to behave more generous than women in China, and it is normal for men to pay the bills of meals for women. When Jin found a different rule to pay bills in Britain, he picked it up happily and used it as evidence to support his argument with Ke.

Another female participant, Yin experienced the first chance in her life to share a house with a boy in Britain, as she wrote down in her diary,

04 November 2005

Sharing a house with a boy

The girl living in the Room 3 moved out. When I was celebrating that no boy would suddenly appear in the corridor, God is very considerate to send me a bigger 'surprise': a boy moves into Room 3... Although he is only 19, it is enough to make me feel embarrassed. I cannot walk freely in the house in my pyjamas after having a shower anymore. Even worse, he lives in the same stair as me, so I have to pass his room after I have a shower, and he usually keeps his door open % #%—%..... annoying... (Yin's diary, 04/11/05)

When I read this diary entry, I was not surprised to see Yin's unease in this situation. Since the dormitory in China is always single sex, Yin was not familiar with the situation of sharing a house with an unfamiliar boy, and in her mind, this had already 'transcended the boundary'. However, Yin could not choose the sex of her housemate in a house arranged by the university, so she tried to get used to sharing a house with her male housemate. This experience made Yin realise and accept that it is normal to share a house with opposite sex housemates in Britain. Whether she was willing or unwilling, Yin was actually enacting what was for her a new gendered performance in Britain.

Unlike Jin and Yin, who perceived different gender behaviour norms in Britain, Zhu found out that his ideology about the power relationship between men and women was challenged in Britain. He discovered that women and men were more equal in Britain than in China in the society.

I always see women are driving, while men are sitting aside. Women smoke like men, and they even smoke more than men. Women are more independent and freer here. They aren't like the women in China, which is a more patriarchal society. If Chinese women come to the UK, they will feel freer, and their minds will become opener. (Interview, 03/06/06)

Zhu perceived British women as having higher social status than Chinese women, and showed his appreciation of the more equal gender relationship.

In sum, changes take place in the participants' behaviour and values in two circumstances: in the first situation, the participants find British gendered behaviour and values more favourable than those in Chinese culture, such as Jin choosing to split the

lunch bill with his female Chinese classmate, and Zhu appreciating British women's independent status; in the second situation, the participants have to accept new gender rules to adapt to British culture, such as Jin found traditionally, he could only get his haircut from a male hairdresser, and Yin had to share a house with a boy.

4.6.2 Resisting new gendered behaviour and values

Besides the moments of accepting new gendered performance and ideologies, there are also the moments of resistance, when the participants find new gendered practices and values unappealing or unacceptable. For example, Jin was not always open to accept the new gendered behaviour in Britain. He described his host family, where he took the 'One-to-One' English course, as a 'bizarre' family, which he described as follows,

The couple was divorced, while they were still living in the same house; the woman lived with her partner and her children upstairs; while the man lived with his partner in downstairs. Even worse, the man had two gay friends. I didn't mind they were gay people, but one of them was very sissy. When he talked to me, he touched me like this (Jin imitated the behaviour). I felt very uncomfortable. So every time, when the two gay people came to visit the house, I hid myself in my room, and never came out. (Talk with Jin, 29/04/06)

The status of the divorced couple challenged Jin's held imagination of a normal family, and the appearance of the two gay people shocked Jin's belief in normal men. The situation of a man and a woman living together without legal marriage is considered as concubinage, which is not accepted as a legal relationship in China; and as mentioned before, the general public in China is not tolerant of homosexuality. Although Jin could accept the abstract

idea about homosexuality in the classroom (see Section 4.5.3), the physical contact with the gay people in reality made him uncomfortable. When Jin actually saw these relationships between men and women, and men and men in Britain, which contradicted the normal relationship between men and women in China, he chose to stick to the old rules that he had learnt in China to keep the distance between the target society and himself, and also keep a space for himself. I understand that the perception of the relationship between men and women is not only a basic gender issue, but also a cultural ideology and a person's deeply held belief, which is not easy to change. Unfortunately, this disagreement on moral values stops Jin having further communication with the family and the family's friends.

Lan also appears to be reluctant to take up new gender behaviour options available in British society. In the following discussion on 17/10/05, Lan showed her understanding of British teenage girls smoking, and her insistence of being who she was.

(Sandra is a female English teacher; Ivan is a male Russian student; Kim is a female South Korean student; Ahmed is a male Iraqi student.)

Sandra: Why do more teenage girls smoke than teenage boys in U.K.?

Lan: They try to imitate adults, to be cool.

Sandra: Girls try to be as equal as boys, and they exaggerate it, they even drink more than boys. How about in China?

Lan: I don't know. More boys smoke than girls.

Ivan: More boys smoke and drink in Russia.

Kim: The situation is the same in Korea.

Sandra: Do you know why more girls smoke in U.K.?

Kim: I think girls have more pressure in U.K., such like open to sex, the relationship.

Ivan: Maybe here, boys like girls smoking and drinking. In Russia, boys don't like girls smoking and drinking. I don't like it.

Sandra: Ahmed, in your country, no one can smoke or drink. How do you feel

when you see teenage girls smoking here?

Ahmed: In my country, if you see a girl smoke, you can beat her. I think women shouldn't smoke.

Ivan: Women are still influenced by men's opinions.

Sandra: I don't like girls smoking, for I have three daughters. But women are taking different roles now; they are not constrained by the family anymore. Would you like to be an English girl, even if you have to go through such pressure?

Kim: Yes, they have more freedom.

Lan: No, I'm very proud of being a Chinese girl.

Sandra: So you are not going to adapt to other models?

Lan: No. (Observation: audio recordings, 17/10/05)

Sandra used this topic to deliver the message that British girls have more freedom as well as more pressure, which sounded attractive to Kim, while not appealing to Lan. Constructed by traditional Chinese culture, Lan regarded smoking as an improper behaviour for women. Lan was happy with her old gender behaviour, values, and gendered self-image, and she was not willing to adapt to the new gender behaviour, smoking, or other gendered models. Lan's personality (see Section 3.14) seems to contribute to her resistance to new gender identity options, as Fan described, 'Lan keeps herself in her own space, and she doesn't communicate with society' (Interview, 13/06/06). The examples of Jin and Lan illustrate that the Chinese learners do not just passively internalise the gendered behaviour and values presented to them by British society. Instead, with their own agency and subjectivities, they sometimes refuse to accept British gendered norms, and keep their own gendered behaviour and ideologies.

Overall it appears that the transformation of gender identity, experienced by the participants, entails a wider range of inter-related phenomena, including changes in ideologies of gender, normative gender roles, social and economic gender relations, and gender performances. The six participants go through different stages in the negotiation of

gender identities. In terms of their own gendered self-images, Jin, Yin and Zhu seem to be more flexible to adapt to new gendered behaviour or ideologies of the target language community than Lan. These Chinese learners are aware of the cultural differences in gender behaviour and values between Chinese culture and British culture, but probably might not clearly understand the norms of the latter. They actually do not fully practise the gender ideologies of each culture. They enact gender identities in ways that they perceive to be beneficial or suitable for themselves, sometimes assimilating to the second culture, sometimes sticking to the first culture. Like the international teaching assistants in American universities in Boxer and Tyler's (2004) study, these Chinese learners may have been developing intercultural gender behaviour, attitudes and values — which do not match the norms of either the home culture or the target culture — are analogous to the interlanguage continuum.

4.7 Summary

In this chapter I have argued, with reference to the six Chinese learners in the study, that their investment in English language learning and their opportunities to practise English must be understood in relation to their gender identities. The six participants' gendered, multiple subjectivities operate within an intricate network, which influences their access to particular linguistic resources, and their engagement in English language learning and use. What they say, how they claim through English, and how they interact with their encounters reflect their unique experiences as being a male or a female. With respect to the

participants' various and fluid gender identities, which enact together with other social factors, the differences in their motivation and agency in English language learning and their English practices exist not only between males and females, but also within males and within females. Thus, it might appear unrealistic to generalise uniform features of male or female Chinese learners' English learning processes and experiences in Britain.

The notion that gender identity is not fixed but can change over time and over places (Sunderland, 2000) encourages me to see the Chinese learners' English learning journeys in Britain as a process of reconstructions of their gender identities. Before arriving in Britain, the participants have already formed pretty robust gender identities, which are highly influenced by their parents' gendered roles. During their English learning journeys in Britain, the participants are not only acquiring new linguistic capacities and resources, but are also engaged in negotiation of who they are and what kind of men/women they could become in this particular English-speaking context. The data generated in various social contexts provides insight into how the participants alter their gendered behaviour and values in Britain. The gender identities reconstructed by the participants seem to be the result of their own gender positioning as well as their perceptions of gender identity options available in British culture.

The findings in this chapter have pedagogical implications on presenting gender-related topics and sex-related issues in the language classroom. Closely exploring gender and language classroom interaction raises a particular issue with regard to how language teachers manage tension or conflict caused by controversial topics in mixed-culture classrooms. Roux (2001) reminds us that although intercultural relations may create many

opportunities for mutual enrichment, conflict is more likely to occur in the classroom where students are characterised by different cultural backgrounds and values. The complexity of language learners' gender identities would suggest that conflict cannot be simply treated as a distraction from the proper task of SLL, or accidental deviation from an 'ideal' SLL situation. Language teachers need to respect students' specific gender identities, deal with the diversity among students in a sensitive manner, and create a positive atmosphere for effective communication, and 'students need to be taught procedures necessary for managing conflict in a constructive way' (Roux, 2001, p. 286). Otherwise, students may simply consider a different point of view as a challenge to their gender identities, and react to it in an emotional way. And then, frustration, misapprehensions, hostility and rejection tend to be the outcome of negative cross-cultural interaction in language classroom (Roux, 2001).

Chapter Five: Construction of National Identity and Discursive Social Interaction

In the previous chapter, I explored the dynamic relationship between gender and second language learning (SLL), which is formed through social practice and in discourse. In this chapter, I will appeal to Wodak *et al.*'s (1999) notion of the discursive construction of national identity, which will allow me to analyse the data that contributes to understanding the relationship between national identity and SLL. Based on the data that I will present in this chapter, I argue that 'encounter with a Chinese self' is a significant component of the Chinese learners' English learning experiences in Britain, as Dolby (2004) suggests that the study abroad context may stimulate new questions and new formulations of their national identities. The first part of this chapter, which includes Section 5.1 and 5.2, will focus on the ways that the six participants reconstruct their Chinese national identities during their English language learning journeys in Britain.

Besides encountering people from Britain and other countries, the six Mainland Chinese students also meet other ethnic Chinese from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Malaysia. Therefore, during their SLL journeys abroad, they not only socialise with the native English speakers, but also socialise with overseas students of other nationalities, and different Chinese-speaking groups. Informed by second language socialisation theory, the rest of this chapter will discuss how the six participants' national identities and cultural backgrounds influence their interaction with different national/cultural groups, and what is the impact of the social interaction on their English language learning?

5.1 The case study of Jin: A journey of discovering himself as a Chinese

I start the discussion with a case study, as it vividly shows a comprehensive picture of the continual process: how one's national identity is challenged and remade through their English learning and living experiences in Britain. Furthermore, Jin's mixed family background made his feeling of being Chinese different from other participants. He was the only person who felt uncertain about his Chinese nationality when he first arrived in Britain, while the other five participants had no question about their Chinese nationalities. For this reason, I think it is necessary to present his experience as a holistic and unique story.

5.1.1 Confused nationality on the first arrival

When I went to Crawley Language School to do classroom observation on the first day, Jin was absent. He was introduced to me by the teacher as a Chinese student, however, Lan pointed out, 'Jin's mother is a Taiwanese, while his father is a South Korean' (Talk with Lan, 17/10/05), to clarify his difference from other 'genuine' Chinese, whose parents are both Chinese. Confused by this information, I put the question to Jin when I first met him,

F: What's your nationality?

Jin: I don't know.

F: Which country's passport do you hold?

Jin: I can have either a Chinese one or a South Korean one.

F: Where were you born?

Jin: I was born in China. (Talk with Jin, 19/10/05)

This extract shows Jin's uncertainty about his nationality on his arrival in Britain. Jin was born and grew up in China, and had been to South Korea to visit his father's relatives twice, but he had never been to Taiwan. When Jin came to study in Crawley Language School, he had the chance to get to know many Taiwanese students and South Korean students for the first time in his life. He made friends with the students from Taiwan, and he always had lunch with his Taiwanese friends. Even when he spoke Mandarin, he shifted his northeast accent, which is generally not highly respected in China, to a Taiwanese accent. Jin also spoke Korean with South Korean students, and he travelled to Edinburgh with a group of South Korean students in November 2005. The following dialogue shows Jin's special friendship with the South Korean students.

(Carl is a male English teacher; Shin is a newly arrived female South Korean student; Ivan is a male Russian student; Ahmed is a male Iraqi student.)

Carl: Can you give us an introduction to yourself, Shin?

Shin: I come from South Korea.

Carl: Can you give a self-introduction to Shin? (looking towards Fan)

Fan: Fan, from China.

Ivan: Ivan, Russian.

Ahmed: Ahmed, from Iraq.

Jin: I'm Jin, nice to meet you. (Jin said this in Korean, but Shin looked confused)

Carl: What are you speaking?

Fan: Korean.

Carl: Where do you come from, Jin?

Jin: China.

Carl: Shin, how about his Korean?

Shin: So so. (all the other students were laughing) (Observation: field notes, 30/03/06)

Jin showed amity to Shin by greeting her in Korean, however, his friendship was not taken in a way as he expected. His Korean language was criticised by the South Korean girl as not being good enough, and he was seen as a Chinese, who could speak Korean language, not as a Korean. The other students felt that he was showing off.

5.1.2 Jin's response to teachers' perceptions of his national identity

Despite Jin's intention of becoming close with Taiwanese students and South Korean students, he was perceived by the teachers in Crawley Language School as a Chinese. As Sarup (1993) reminds me that we often see ourselves as we think others see us, I was not surprised to see Jin often took the role of a Chinese in the classroom context. This can be illustrated in the following extract.

(Carl is a male English teacher; Kim is a female South Korean student.)

Carl: It's interesting that he (the lecturer in the tape recorder) mentioned China as a developing country. Because from the economy perspective, it doesn't look like this, China is rich.

Jin: China is a big country, and some places are very poor.

Fan: Yeah, yeah.

Carl: How about South Korea?

Kim: Developed and developing country.

Carl: How do we distinguish developed country and developing country?

Zhu: GDP per person.

Jin: Yeah, GDP. (Observation: field notes, 02/11/05)

In this classroom interaction, Jin took the role of a Chinese student by offering information about China, the country that he felt most familiar with. His opinion was supported by Fan,

a female Chinese student. Jin also supported the answer given by Zhu, a male Chinese student. The cohort of Chinese students, who supported each other's opinions, appeared in this classroom interaction, and Jin was a member of the cohort. A shared Chinese national identity then became a basis for classroom solidarity. Here, Jin is clearly representing the teacher's expectation. In addition, I found that when Kate, a female English teacher, asked the students to write a 600-word essay on the current situation on the economy, or politics, or health of their native countries, Jin chose to write about the situation of health in China, where he had lived for 18 years. All of these practices kept reminding Jin that he was perceived as a Chinese.

5.1.3 Finding the difference from South Korean students

Identity is marked by similarity with people like us; and also by difference, of those who are not (Woodward, 2000). As time passed, Jin discovered more differences rather than similarities between the South Korean students and himself, and Jin's intention of becoming close with South Korean students ended with failure. After the class on 30 March 2006, I had lunch with Jin in a Chinese restaurant. I asked him,

F: Do you still spend a lot of time with South Korean students after class?

Jin: No. I had a trouble with the leader of the South Korean group on last Sunday, firstly, I found the older students refused to talk to me, and then the younger students ran away from me, now even the Korean girls. The Korean students hold together very much. I once visited the leader's room, and he had a Korean national flag on his wall. When the flag becomes dirty, they burn it. It's scary. Chinese people are more flexible than South Koreans. (Talk with Jin, 30/03/06)

The differences between the leader of the South Korean group and Jin exist not only in the way of handling friendship, but also in the deeply rooted cultural values. After Jin was excluded from the South Korean group, Fan and many Chinese students were sympathetic towards him, and he continued making friends with students from Mainland China and Taiwan. Having a Taiwanese mother is not contradictory to his national identity as a Chinese, since Jin believes Taiwan is part of China. This position keeps him as a member of the Chinese student group. The long-term observation shows Jin's shifted attitude towards the South Korean students: from enthusiastic to disappointed. It is likely that Jin's participation in various English learning activities reinforces his own sense of Chinese national identity.

5.1.4 Displaying the role of a Chinese

Having had unpleasant experiences with South Korean students, Jin tended to confirm his role of being a Chinese, and interacted with people from different countries accordingly. For example, he explicated the nature of Chinese characters to his Russian classmate in the break time. This is a good example of inter-cultural communication in English, initiated by the motivation to introduce the culture of the language learners' native countries to people from other countries. Jin's Chinese national identity becomes meaningful in display. His desire to raise awareness of his Chinese heritage not only influenced Jin's behaviour in the language school, but also influenced his behaviour in other social contexts, such as a local leisure centre, where Jin went swimming every day. We had a conversation on swimming,

when Jin visited me on a Sunday afternoon in April 2006,

F: Are you going to swim today?

Jin: No, I am very tired. I went for a swim yesterday, and an old lady swam more quickly than me. I felt very shy.

F: Why?

Jin: Since I am the only Chinese person in the swimming pool, I have to swim more quickly than others. (Talk with Jin, 29/04/06)

From this extract, I can see that Jin considered himself as a representative of Chinese in a British public place, and he was determined to deliver a positive feature — swimming quickly — to the people of other nationalities in the swimming pool. It seems that Jin's sense of being a Chinese was enhanced during his English language learning journey in Britain. In our last interview, I put the same question to Jin as when I met him on the first time, and Jin was able to give a clear answer on his national identity after staying in Britain for one year.

F: Now, if someone asks you, 'where do you come from?' how will you answer it?

Jin: Now, I will say 'China'. If I am not familiar with the person, I will stop here. If I am familiar with the person, I will continue to introduce my family briefly. (Interview, 27/05/06)

Here, Jin finally confirms his Chinese nationality. Jin's English learning journey in Britain involved negotiation and the development of his national identity. Through his interaction with British people, overseas students of other nationalities, typically South Korean students, and other Chinese fellows, Jin finally defined himself as a 'Chinese' in response to others' construction of him. His story vividly illustrates the complex, emotive, on-going

process of the reconstruction of the personal national identity in a mixed-culture context. It also demonstrates that second language learners are people, whose history, participation and self-imagination are tightly interconnected in complex ways over the course of their second language learning.

5.2 Raising the awareness of being a Chinese

As Dolby (2004) argues, national identity can shift from a passive to an active identity in the study abroad context. Chinese national identity is often invisible in contexts where Chinese is accepted as ‘the norm’, a Chinese identity is only invigorated in a situation where Chinese students become ‘the other’. The following section will discuss the raising awareness of being a Chinese across the participants. For example, Zhu recognised his strong patriotism in comparison with the British people he encountered. This can be revealed from Zhu’s disagreement with his female English teacher, Kate, on what they should do when their motherlands had been attacked.

I find British people’s ideas are very different. When I asked Kate, ‘are you going to counterattack if your country is attacked?’ She said, ‘no, that’s the business of the government, I will only protect my family members. The war is the issue of the government; the people in the other country also don’t want the war.’ I said, ‘I will definitely go to the battlefield, if China has a war with other countries’. (Interview, 03/06/06)

Clinging to the patriotic trace, Zhu was willing to defend China without any question. Kate, in Zhu’s eyes, was not patriotic. He considered the difference between Kate and himself

was culturally embedded, as he explained,

I think the people here have very different ideas from Chinese people. Chinese people's ideas are too strong, passionate and exciting. Why do we learn history? It makes us feel proud of our country, our gorgeous culture and history. (Interview, 03/06/06)

Zhu's patriotism seems to be grounded in his knowledge and information about Chinese culture and history, which could relate to the patriotic education he had received in China.

When I continued asking him to give me a definition of 'patriotic' in the interview, he put it in the following ways,

Firstly, no matter in which situation, you have to show you are a Chinese. That means in the argument, you should protect the benefit of China. You shouldn't give up arguing on some principle problems just because your English is not good enough. Secondly, it's necessary and possible to introduce the current situation of China to Western people, since Western people don't know about China, or they just know the superficial knowledge of China, such as Gong Fu, or simple Buddhism ideas. (Interview, 03/06/06)

Zhu's statement reflects his awareness of his authoring of 'China', and the necessity he felt to defend China through oral display, despite the lack of English language competence. Under this patriotic obligation, Zhu preferred to chat with foreigners in the pub instead of other Chinese students, although he still had difficulty in expressing himself in English freely.

For example, I got to know a German couple three weeks ago in the pub. The husband has been to Beijing, and he told me what he had seen in Beijing. Then I introduced him to the economy, the political system, and the social situation of

China. Then he introduced me to the Western European economy system. So we two had some communication. (Interview, 03/06/06)

Here, Zhu's Chinese national identity is actively displayed: he, a Chinese introduces the policies and current situation of China to a German couple in Britain. Furthermore, Zhu's strong patriotic feeling tends to become motivation, which pushes him to speak English with British and foreigners.

Different from Zhu, Fan had another agenda of displaying her patriotism and her Chinese national identity. She paid more attention to her own behaviour in Britain than in China, since she felt she was a representative of Chinese here.

I don't care how others look at me in China. But I am very careful here, and I will pay attention to my friends' behaviour. When you are in China, you feel like at home, however casual you behave, it's ok. Here, no matter how much you want to integrate into this society, you have different colour in skin and hair, this is other's home. You have to do everything carefully. If you do bad things at home, others just criticise you. But if you do bad things here, others might not criticise you, but they will criticise your country. (Interview, 13/06/06)

Fan recognised that she was the one, who was marked physically, and who was outside 'the norm' in Britain. This awareness made Fan become sensitive to her own and her friends' manners in Britain, since any misbehaviour here may lead to defamation of China. Another female participant, Yin, described the similar feeling of 'representing China' in her diary,

When you come abroad, you represent China. Your speech and your behaviour reveal your national character. Other people will not only comment on what kind of person Yin is, they comment more on what kind of people Chinese are. (Yin's diary,

24/11/05)

In order to display her own sense of a Chinese self, Yin tried to get more information about China.

I pay more attention to the things which happen in China here. I didn't pay attention to the news in China before. Here, although you can't understand the paragraph of English, you will still try to read it to see what happens in China recently. (Interview, 14/05/06)

Yin chose to read English news about China in Britain to guarantee that she would know well about the current issues in China, although she had to struggle with her inefficient English language. The increased awareness of being a Chinese influenced Yin's participation in the following discussion on 'refugees' in the language class.

I felt embarrassed yesterday, because when Neal (a male British teacher) asked what kind of refugees there were in Japan, and they said, 'Chinese'. They said that Chinese came to Japan to earn money, and many Chinese worked as prostitutes there. (Talk with Yin, 18/11/05)

Yin had an unhappy experience of the classroom discussion, as she was unwilling to negotiate the negative sentiments expressed about China with other international students. She simply put herself in a position of defending something she knew was not a positive feature of being Chinese.

Xu also felt the need to defend China, but realised that the patriotism he had was not enough for an argument. For example, in the party to celebrate Chinese New Year in Spencer Language School, Xu met some Chinese teachers from Shenzhen, who were

currently taking a training programme in Spencer Language School. They told the British teachers that Chinese greeted each other in New Year by saying ‘Gong Xi Fa Cai’, which meant ‘wish you make a lot of money’. This was because Chinese people were poor. They wrote the question, ‘when was Macao occupied by Portuguese?’ for games. All of these made Xu feel very angry, and he left the party early, because he could not bear that this negative perspective of China was exposed to his British teachers and other international students (Talk with Xu, 24/01/06). Although Xu could feel that the reason of saying ‘Gong Xi Fa Cai’ was misinterpreted, he lacked both sufficient knowledge and English language skills to argue with these Chinese teachers. As he talked to me on the second day,

Xu: Why do we greet with each other with ‘Gong Xi Fa Cai’ in Chinese New Year?

F: Just to wish you become rich. This phrase comes from Lu Xun’s story, ‘Leaving the Pass’.

Xu: Is it because Chinese people are poor?

F: Not actually. Nowadays, many Chinese people are rich, but they still say this. It’s more like a custom.

Xu: I wish I knew this yesterday, and I wish my English was as good as yours, so that I could argue with those Chinese teachers. (Talk with Xu, 24/01/06)

When Xu faced the challenge to his Chinese national identity, he realised that he had limited knowledge in both Chinese culture and English language. For Xu, this was a frustrating experience, as he failed to defend China in such an international circumstance.

In contrast to the other four Chinese students, Lan perceived other Chinese students’ increased awareness of being Chinese, while she kept herself as an outsider.

Lan: I didn’t feel that Chinese were very patriotic when I was in China. But after I came here, I found that Chinese were very patriotic. They expressed this very well.

They always argued hotly on the Taiwan issue. Although they spoke in a very angry and agitated way, which was not good, they were really very patriotic. I think they should argue step by step, and in a very calm way.

F: This is other Chinese students' behaviour, how about you?

Lan: I don't mind, let it be. If Taiwan is unified, that's fine. If Taiwan is not unified currently, it will be unified in the future. It just takes time. (Interview, 08/06/06)

Zhu, Fan, Yin and Xu consider their Chinese national identity as a property right, which should be displayed to be affirmed. Their strong senses of their 'Chinese national self' appear to become the agency that pushes them to use English language in various ways: Zhu initiated conversations with both native English speakers and other foreign encounters; Yin tried to read English newspapers; and Xu felt the pressure to improve his English to support his argument. Lan's sense of Chinese national identity is detached from strong patriotic emotion, which makes her more open to see other views beyond the retention of patriotism. It is also evident that the Chinese national identity is continuously constructed outside of the physical border of China, as it is constructed in an English pub, an English language classroom, as well as an international Chinese New Year party.

5.3 Interaction with British people: To become multicultural

This section will explore the opportunities and obstacles that the participants experienced in their interaction with British people, and their adaptation to British culture.

5.3.1 The opportunities and obstacles of meeting British people

Since the construction of national identity is based on the formation of sameness as well as difference (Wodak, *et al.*, 1999), it is interesting to note how the six participants' intricate articulations of 'being Chinese' were directed towards British people, overseas students of other nationalities, and different Chinese-speaking groups in Britain. Five of the six participants had stable access to native English speakers: Jin, Fan and Xu lived in host families; Yin had two British housemates; and Zhu worked part-time in a local hospital, however, all of them commented that they were not satisfied with both the quantity and the quality of their interaction with British people. For example, Jin had little communication with the members of the host families, because of the differences in social classes and ages. The lack of British classmates in the foundation course and the predominant pub culture in the UK also stopped Jin from mixing with British people, as he stated,

You don't have many chances to get to know British when you do a foundation course. I am not a pub person, and I don't like to drink in a pub. (Interview, 27/05/06)

Compared to the other five participants, Jin had the advantage in meeting British students, as he was taking A-level biology courses in a local public school in the afternoon. He enjoyed the interaction with his British classmates during a two-week biology course in Oxford in the Easter vacation.

I was very happy in the two weeks when I studied in Oxford. I studied with my British friends, we lived together, and we went out together. (Interview, 27/05/06)

From this extract, I can see how Jin values the meaningful communication and the

development of friendship between the British students and him in this short period of study in Oxford. Yin also had the opportunity to meet British people, as she had two British housemates. However, she was reluctant to interact with them because of lack of confidence in her English language ability. They only talked to each other when some problems happened.

We once communicated in English, when we installed the BT internet. At that time, my English was very poor, so I always used very simple English. (Interview, 14/05/06)

Although Yin's English was improving as time went on, she still only had superficial interaction with British people, because

The UK is an old country, British people are gentle, and they are not as open as Americans. It's very hard for international students to integrate with typical British. (Interview, 14/05/06)

Yin thought it was not only her insufficient English competence, which stopped her having intensive interaction with British.

I feel it's quite hard to integrate into their lives. There is a transparent wall, and British are preventing us. (Interview, 14/05/06)

In this extract, Yin used 'a transparent wall' to symbolise the difficulties of integrating into British society besides her insufficient English. From Yin's view, having massive communication with British people was difficult, and particularly, she felt that British

people were unwilling to accept her as a member in British society.

After living in Britain for a considerably long period of time, the six participants' freshness of meeting British people have gone. They are not satisfied with the superficial conversation with British people any more. They wish to learn more about the British culture and discuss personal interests with those they encounter. However, there are several difficulties preventing them developing social networks and having a great amount of interaction with host nationals: insufficient communicative competence and cultural differences, which are entangled with gender differences (see Section 4.4), social class differences (see Section 7.10.1), and age differences (see Section 7.10.1).

5.3.2 To adapt to British culture

One would be curious to know the symbolic meaning of the 'transparent wall' mentioned by Yin. Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) suggested that the differences in lifestyles and values were the obstacles that prevented many Chinese students making true friends with British people. Since certain cultural forms of life and collective manners of behaviour are important elements of national identity as I argued in Section 2.3.2, here I consider the six participants' cultural practices as a reflection of their Chinese national identities. According to Wodak, *et al.* (1999), the common culture embraces a range of topics of language, religion, art, science and technology, as well as everyday culture, which includes eating and drinking habits, clothing, and so on. After living in the UK for a year, the six

participants' had mixed attitudes towards daily cultural differences, and adapted to British culture in various ways. For example, Zhu and Fan started to appreciate individualism, which is highly valued in British culture. As Zhu commented in the final interview,

The British people concentrate on their careers, and they do whatever they want. If you don't do something illegal, no one will care what you are doing, even you have a transsexual operation, which is heavily censured in China. (Interview, 03/06/06)

Similar to Zhu, Fan felt that British people did not care about others' private life due to the emphasis on individuality, according to her experience of living in host families from June 2006 to April 2007.

I still like to live with British people. Their lives are theirs, and my life is mine. When I told them something, they listened and gave me their opinions for my reference... If you say this to a Chinese, they will definitely think that you say this is because your benefit is related, or you want to gain something from this. (Interview, 13/06/06)

From this extract, I can see on the one hand, Fan is satisfied with her host family members, who respect her privacy and independent capability; on the other hand, she feels tired of the personal interests involving relationships with her Chinese co-nationals. Besides the changes which happened to the participants' value systems, there are also some changes which occurred in their attitudes and behaviour. For example, the adult British people's good manners were valued by Zhu.

The adults here are very nice and polite. Maybe they are very fake, but they are better than Chinese, Chinese are fake and impolite. (Interview, 03/06/06)

However, Fan had doubts about British adults' good manners which she experienced in the following extract:

I feel sometimes Sally (a female English teacher) just showed her good manner to us. There were so many papers on the floor, why did she just pick up the one in front of us? I feel British people are quite fake sometimes. They just show this to the people from other countries, 'look, we British people can pick up the paper, why don't you do that?' (Interview, 13/06/06)

Sally's action, from Fan's perspective, perhaps aims to display her British national identity, which she implies is superior to other national identities, including Chinese national identity. Though of course, we can question whether this is Sally's purpose of her behaviour as Fan perceives, the significance of this case lies in its certainty to the connection that Fan made between Sally's manner and her British national identity. Although Zhu and Fan's comments reflect their uncertainty about British people's good manners, they tried to behave in a similar way in their daily lives in Britain, as they understood this was the manner they had to show here. In various contexts, I observed all six participants becoming more polite orally: they said 'thank you' frequently to staff in the language school, to the shop assistants, to the bus drivers, and to the waiters/waitresses who served them in the restaurants; they said 'sorry' when they just passed a person closely. Both phrases are not commonly used in the similar situations in China, as it is unnecessary to verbalise personal appreciation during transactions in Chinese culture. The six participants were aware of the different communications styles and politeness norms in Britain, and started to follow the unwritten rules governing interaction of this nature in

Britain.

Moreover, the distance between themselves and British people resulted in the participants' confusion over some British behaviour. Xu gave me two examples on his experiences of British culture.

My friends and I decided to travel to Brighton after we took the IELTS test. I called to book the hotel. They told me that if I booked for one night, it's 90 pounds per night, but if I booked for two nights, it's 135 pounds per night. I thought I got the information wrong, so I called them three times to make sure, and they told me that I got the right information. I couldn't understand it till now. (Interview, 24/05/06)

Last time, I went to Margate, I ordered a kid's meal, and they told me that I couldn't order it. I couldn't understand that I also paid it, and why I couldn't have it? Maybe in their minds, this is a rule. But in China, there are always potential rules. (Interview, 24/05/06)

Xu could not understand the behaviour of British people, as this contradicted the sale rules in China: people usually get a discount when they book a room in a hotel for more than one night; and everyone can buy the kid's meal if they pay with the right money. Unfortunately, the limited knowledge of British culture that he learnt in the language classroom, and the lack of social network with native English speakers put Xu in the position of accepting the British routine passively although he was still uncertain and confused about certain practices. These two examples demonstrate that in some cases, Chinese learners will change their behaviour in order to adapt to British culture, while these changes in behaviour may not suggest inner value changes.

All six participants had changed part of their daily living routines in Britain. In terms of dressing habits, Lan became more informal in her way of dressing; Fan stopped dressing

totally in black, and started to try different colour clothes; Xu started to associate with famous brands, such as Gucci and Armani; Jin and Yin were following the fashions on the high street. In terms of eating habits, they started to have more fast food; they spent more time on the internet, instead of socialising with their family and friends they had left back home. The participants were using their own ways to modulate their lives in the UK, and to assimilate to the target community physically. For example, when I met Xu in front the building of Spencer Language School in early April, he was wearing a blue and white T-shirt,

F: Are you cold?

Xu: Yes.

F: Why do you wear so little?

Xu: Because the English people just dress like this. (Talk with Xu, 11/04/06)

I understand Xu's wearing a T-shirt in the cold weather as a way to adapt to British culture, rather than marking himself as a newly arrived foreigner.

According to our conversations, I found out that none of the six participants intended to stay in Britain after attaining their degrees in British universities; therefore, they did not have much pressure to assimilate to British culture. After staying in the UK for one year, they still chose to adopt Chinese culture's values for developing close affective relationship with family members and friends (see Section 5.5.2); and at the same time, they became more practical in facing daily life situations following the British pattern of dealing with daily life routines. Their value systems, attitudes and behaviour could not be purely identified with either Chinese culture or British culture. They were not living in one

culture, but living between Chinese culture and British culture. It was likely that some of these Chinese learners developed mixed value systems that corresponded to both the home culture and host culture, and finally tended to become 'multicultural'.

5.4 Interaction with overseas students of other nationalities

In this section, I will investigate the factors that prevent the participants establishing and developing friendships with overseas students of other nationalities. I will then particularly address the participants' attitudes to and their interaction with Japanese and South Korean students, in terms of the special relationship between Japan, South Korea and China.

5.4.1 The difficulties of developing friendship with other international students

Studying in a language school provides Chinese learners with many opportunities to meet and interact with overseas students of other nationalities. Jin had the tendency to mix more with Asian students than European students, because of the smaller amount of cultural difference. Jin disliked Middle Eastern students, and felt uncomfortable in getting on with them. He complained, 'I don't like their attitudes and their behaviour. They are quite noisy, and they are not good-looking' (Talk with Jin, 16/04/06). Even when Jin made friends with the students of other nationalities, the friendship was superficial, because of the differences in lifestyles and values. Jin lived in the same host family as Ivan, his Russian classmate, but they failed to become close friends.

Besides dating, Ivan just sleeps. He can sleep for the whole weekend. I have to do a lot of work to prepare for the A-level biology exam; he just counts the date when he can go back to Russia to spend his Easter vacation. (Talk with Jin, 11/03/06)

When Jin and Ivan met each other in the host family, they would chat a bit. However, this interaction was relatively superficial, which did not produce much English speaking practice.

Xu had a similar experience to Jin, but for slightly different reasons. Xu shared a room firstly with a Japanese and then with a Uruguayan boy in his host family. However, he had not had any deep conversation with them, but simply greeted each other every day. The same situation existed in his interaction with his foreign classmates in the language school.

Xu concluded this in the final interview,

I haven't had any good foreign friends till now because of cultural difference. I am now in a language school in which the students change quickly. I don't have long-period friends. I may not meet many of them again in my life... Now, we just greet each other when we meet. (Interview, 24/05/06)

The constraints of cultural differences and high mobility did not allow Xu to develop friendships with other international students during his second language learning journey.

It is also not easy for Zhu to make friends with people from other countries either, because

we have no common topics to talk, and we have different cultural backgrounds. It also depends on my mood. I'm a pessimistic person, and I am not happy with my life in England, so I don't want to talk with people from other countries. (Talk with Zhu, 17/04/06)

Zhu made a connection between his black mood and his lack of motivation to communicate with other international students. This extract contains two implications: Zhu is not willing to share his unhappiness with other international students, because of the lack of intimate friendship between them; secondly, Zhu's sense of the distance from those international students affects their communication in English. It appears that cultural difference may be one of the most significant elements which prevent Chinese learners establishing meaningful relationships with other international students.

Yin also found it was quite difficult to become good friends with the people from different countries, because students always gather together with their co-nationals after class. Similarly, Gonzalez (2004) reports that strong ties and attachments are developed between international students from the same country of origin. It is understandable that students usually feel it easy to communicate with others who share the similar ethnic backgrounds, cultural understanding and language. A shared language will guarantee one's intended meanings are conveyed to their listeners, that one is heard as they wish to be heard (Miller, 2003). When the international students' English levels do not allow them to express themselves freely, they turn to their own compatriot students to have interesting and deep conversations.

5.4.2 Attitudes towards Japanese and South Korean students

Japan and South Korea occupy very special places in Chinese foreign policy, because both these countries are China's next door neighbours, and because of the long and complicated

history the three countries have together. The Second Sino-Japanese War (July 7, 1937-September 9, 1945) was the largest Asian war in the twentieth century. It not only resulted in the rise of modern Chinese national identity in 1930s (Leibold, 2006), but also still remains as a major roadblock for Sino-Japanese relations today, and many Chinese people harbour grudges over the war and related issues (Mitter, 2003).

Before the six participants, except Jin, came to Britain, their knowledge of Japanese and South Koreans mainly came from history books, newspapers, and TV programmes. After staying in Britain for one year, they got to know Japanese and South Koreans in real life. Observing and communicating with Japanese and South Korean students helped Zhu to achieve further understanding on the differences among Chinese, South Korean and Japanese.

Zhu: Why did China lose the Sino-Japanese war, although we had so many people? I know the reason now. Chinese people just care about themselves, while Japanese put their country at the first place. Why did Japan and South Korea develop so quickly? Because their people can do anything for their countries. My South Korean classmate told me that South Korean people seldom buy Benz or BMW, they just buy Hyundai, the cars produced by themselves. They seldom drink Coca-Cola, they drink the cola produced by themselves...This is why South Korea is well-developed.

F: Did you have this idea in China?

Zhu: No, I got this idea after I came to the UK. (Interview, 03/06/06)

Zhu's patriotic traits made him become aware of the nationalism displayed by Japanese and South Koreans. According to my observation, Zhu treated his female South Korean classmates in a friendly way, but he rarely talked to the Japanese students he encountered in the language school. His national identity tends to determine whom he should interact

with and whom he should not.

Compared to Zhu's hesitation in interacting with Japanese students, Yin appeared to be more open to socialise with Japanese students. Yin learnt how to communicate with people from different countries, especially from other Asian countries, in the language school.

When you come to a language school, you may meet different Asians, such as Japanese, South Koreans. When you were in China, you wouldn't imagine you would make friends with Japanese... But when you come here, they are friendly to you, and even help you; can you forget the enmity for a while, although you remember the history? I feel strange. I never thought that I would have friendship with Japanese. (Interview, 14/05/06)

Studying in the UK provides Yin the first chance to make friends with Japanese people. This experience Yin had with her Japanese friends changed her perceptions of Japanese. She started to question the element of her Chinese national identity, and attempted to consider Japanese students' positions, thus opening up possibilities for treating Japanese students in an alternative way.

December 26, 2005

...none of my Japanese friends, who are under 22, knows that China was invaded by Japan. This of course is caused by the problem of their history text books...When Chinese meet Japanese, we are hostile to them spontaneously, but they feel confused, as they don't know why we dislike them. They are as innocent as the Chinese who were slaughtered by Japanese army. If we treat the innocents as villains, how can we convince them by reasoning? (Yin's diary, 26/12/05)

Yin was conscious that the young Japanese students she had met knew little about the Sino-Japanese War, and this led her to rethink about how to interact with them. In order to defend

the fame of China, Yin thought Chinese had to use their brains to convince others by reasoning. In this case, I can see the experience of study abroad allows Yin to transcend the constraints of Chinese national identity in its existing form, and to look critically at her own values and ways of thought. Holding this reformed opinion, Yin had no problem doing group work with her Japanese classmates in the language class.

The data presented in this section suggests that it is important to understand Chinese learners' mixed and complicated attitudes towards South Korean and Japanese students, as these attitudes have a direct impact on their interaction with South Korean and Japanese students in the language classroom. It also illustrates that the English language learning journey in Britain provides Chinese learners an opportunity to communicate with South Korean and Japanese students and to rethink about their attitudes towards these two nations. More importantly, this journey stimulates Chinese learners to scrutinise their own national identities.

5.5 Interaction with Chinese co-nationals

In this section, I will turn to discuss the participants' mixed feelings towards their compatriots: their perceptions of the disadvantages and their social needs to socialise with Chinese co-nationals.

5.5.1 The disadvantages of socialising with Chinese co-nationals

When I visited the three language schools, I always saw a clear Chinese speaking territory in the common room or in front of the school building, where students were visibly and audibly enacting their Chineseness. The six participants were invariably in this group. With regard to the intensive interaction with other Chinese students, the participants had contradictory feelings about their Chinese co-nationals: they appeared to be torn between developing English for academic purpose and using Chinese for gaining friendship from compatriots. Jin, for example, came to Britain to spend one year learning English. When he was in China, he was attracted by photos shown by the study abroad agency, in which the Chinese students were having classes with people from different countries; going out with British friends; and playing with the dogs in the spacious living room of a host family. After Jin arrived in Britain, his expectation was challenged by the real situation. When Jin took the foundation class in Crawley Language School, four out of seven students in his class were Chinese, and 36% students in the school were Chinese. Jin described his feeling towards other Chinese students in his class in the interview,

On the first day when I came to the school, I was thinking about why there were so many Chinese in the class. Since I came to study in the UK, I should have the feeling of taking a class in the UK, but I still have the feeling of taking a class in China. When I entered the classroom, I heard Fan and Ke discussing what they were going to eat today, Lan talking about the cartoon she watched yesterday, and Zhu talking about his part-time job in Chinese. Ivan was sitting aside. It's just like a class in China, we have a British teacher, and we have one foreign student. The class is very different from my imagination. But now, I don't care anymore, I don't pay attention to it, and I am going to graduate soon. (Interview, 27/05/06)

The gap between Jin's expectation and the realistic situation of study in a language school in Britain is partly a result of British education marketing. As a customer, Jin was not

satisfied with the 'product' he was sold, and he could not return the product. Jin accepted the realistic situation with disappointment, and he expressed his feeling of relief at the end of the foundation course.

Similar to Jin, Fan experienced a range of attitudes towards her Chinese classmates in the language school, from being angry to not caring.

My mother told me that the students doing a foundation course should come from different countries. When I saw most of my classmates were Chinese, I felt very bad. How could I learn English? At the beginning, I refused to speak any Chinese in the class and after the class. Zhu's English was very poor at that time. When I heard someone speaking Chinese, I would say, 'could you speak English? Don't speak Chinese. Speak English, please.' Zhu asked me when we would have the exam. I answered him in English. He said, 'Fan, I beg you, please say this in Chinese.' Then I explained to him in Chinese since he pleaded me. Jin and I thought we came here to learn English, and we shouldn't speak Chinese, although there were quite a few Chinese students. Later, I don't know why, I feel Chinese people still need to communicate in Chinese. (Interview, 13/06/06)

Fan firstly strived to communicate with other Chinese classmates in English, but failed to achieve her goal in the end. Pellegrino Aveni (2005) suggests that the success of second language practice with other compatriot students depends in large part on the willingness of the others to maintain that communication in the second language. Fan could not force other Chinese students to speak English to her, so she had to accept the situation as time went on. Finally, Fan felt that information exchange might not only be possible in Chinese, but might in fact be more successfully performed in Chinese than in English.

Zhu was also unhappy at having three Chinese classmates considering his English language learning.

This is not helpful for my English. Later, I communicated with them less than before, as I was wondering on whether I come here to learn English or Chinese? When Chinese gather together, we speak Chinese...But I can't avoid the Chinese in my class, as we see each other every day. (Interview, 03/06/06)

As the data shows, these participants felt resentful about speaking Chinese because that took their time away from speaking English. However, socialising with other Chinese students required them to speak Chinese, as Jin described,

If you speak English to Chinese students, they may think you are showing off, and compare your English with their English. So you need to pay attention and try to avoid mistakes. It doesn't matter if you go back to China when you finish your language course. But we are going to continue studying in British universities for another three years, and I think it's good to try to speak English and engage in British society. (Call to Jin, 16/04/06)

The pressure Jin felt falls into three categories. The first type of pressure was that Jin was afraid of being thought of as showing off. The second type of peer pressure Jin felt was that he was afraid of making mistakes in front of others in order to keep face. The third type of pressure that Jin described was the English level required at university, and the importance of integrating into British community.

The disadvantages increase when the proportion of Chinese learners in the language school is very large: firstly, these Chinese learners did not feel that the English language classroom environment here was different from that in China; secondly, these Chinese learners seemed to be torn between a dilemma of speaking English to meet the requirements of academic discourse and speaking Chinese to socialise with their Chinese-speaking peers. National identity and language functions seem to be two side-by-side

components of the dilemma.

5.5.2 The advantages of socialising with Chinese co-nationals

If we understand a Chinese student as a whole person, not only as a second language learner, it will help us to understand some phenomena that are beyond the second language instructor's control, such as why do Chinese students always gather together and speak Chinese to each other? For all six participants, their most developed social network was with Chinese co-nationals. They spent most of their time before classes, between classes, and during lunch talking with their Chinese friends. Jin pointed out that Chinese friends were much better at providing practical help, because 'it's easy to communicate and solve problems with Chinese' (Call to Jin, 16/04/06). Others emphasised how effective it was in providing them with emotional support.

When Xu started his course in Spencer Language School, there were only a few Chinese students in the language school. After Christmas, there were more Chinese students coming in. Xu felt comfortable with having a small number of Chinese students in the language school.

The important thing is that we have some common topics to talk about. Being alone makes me feel lonely. I would like to have some Chinese friends, as we don't have big cultural differences. (Interview, 24/05/06)

The friendship with other Chinese students gave Xu emotional support to continue his study in Britain. It might be necessary to make it clear here that Xu was actually enjoying

hanging around with other Chinese students after class, but not in the language classroom, as he joked,

If the class has 10 students, and 8 of them are Chinese. The foreign classmates feel annoyed, the teachers feel annoyed, and the Chinese feel annoyed too. (Interview, 24/05/06)

However, this kind of friendship is not always nice and sweet. For example, Zhu got tired of the benefit involving friendship with other Chinese,

I think the habit of splitting the bill in the UK is very good. Friends are friends, and our relationship is free of conflict of interest. In China, you invite me today, and I invite you tomorrow. As time goes on, I think I invite you more than you invite me, then I am not happy. (Interview, 03/06/06)

Although Zhu still spent more time with Chinese students rather than students of other nationalities as I observed, he did not value his friendship with other Chinese in Britain as much as that in China.

I don't treat them with my heart. We just talk and play basketball together. They are not like the friends I made in China. I felt very happy to play with my friends in China. I don't have any genuine friends in Crawley Language School. (Interview, 03/06/06)

Zhu considered friends as an important part in his life. His high expectation of friends, especially Chinese friends, resulted in his disappointment and loneliness in Britain. Maybe in other words, Zhu's criticism on his existing friendship with other Chinese students in Britain possibly reflect his desire to make true Chinese friends in Britain.

Getting on with her Chinese housemates taught Fan a great lesson in life. Fan moved out from her host family in May 2006, and then shared a house with three other Chinese students, because she wanted to spend more time with her good Chinese friend, Ke.

Although everyone has his/her own style of life, everyone has his/her own way of speech, you live in a big environment, you have to care about something, and you have to grow up...Now, I look at how others behave, although I don't want to copy their ways, but I learn something from them slowly. Ke said it's a mistake for me to move to her house, which made me experience so many things. I don't think so, every step I moved is not a mistake, I can gain something from every step. This makes me understand how I should move on. (Interview, 13/06/06)

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory indicates that people may have lower order needs that in general must be fulfilled before high order needs can be satisfied. For Fan, the need of friendship takes the higher priority than the need of oral English development. Thus, she made the decision to move into a 'Chinese' house at the cost of losing the opportunity of interacting with her host family, the only reliable English linguistic resource outside the classroom presented to her in Britain. Sharing a house with co-nationals was a more complicated experience than living in a British host family for Fan, while the deep interaction between Fan and her Chinese housemates stimulated Fan's inner growth, and made her become a more mature adult.

Fan's action might not meet the approval of a second language educator, who would expect the second language learner to invest their time and efforts to communicate with the native speakers, rather than to hang around with their co-national friends and 'miss the point' of study abroad. Chinese learners come to Britain to learn English, but they may have greater, and perhaps more pressing needs as well, such as the need of friendship. The

friendships with their peers are a particularly important part of their lives. Bochner *et al.* (1977) studied the friendship patterns of overseas students, and suggested that students need different types of relationships: monocultural, bicultural and multicultural friendship networks, among which monocultural networks play an important role in providing a small number of close friendships. It is evidenced by the data that the social interaction with Chinese co-nationals is important to Chinese learners in Britain, because it provides sufficient friendship, and thus helps meet Chinese learners' social and affective needs, so that they can survive in their English language learning abroad journeys.

5.6 Interaction with students from Taiwan

For Mainland Chinese students, the students from Taiwan form a unique group, as they are neither foreigners nor Chinese like them. Different beliefs on 'being Chinese' and different politic stances contribute to the sensitive and tense relationship between the students from Mainland China and Taiwan. In order to understand the participants' attitudes towards students from Taiwan and their behaviour described in the following data, one needs to know some background information about the Taiwan issue.

From 1683, Taiwan was ruled by Qing Dynasty as a prefecture, and in 1887, this island was made into a separated Chinese province. In 1949, after losing the Chinese mainland as a result of the Chinese civil war, the Republic of China government under the Kuomintang withdrew to Taiwan. The Kuomintang had been the seat of the government of the Republic of China until the presidential election in 2000, when the Democratic

Progressive Party candidate Chen Shuibian, who supported Taiwan independence, was elected president of Taiwan.

Taiwan issue lies at the core of Chinese national identity in terms of the ideas of territorial integrity (Gupta, 2005). According to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, 'Taiwan is part of the sacred territory of the People's Republic of China. It is the inviolable duty of all Chinese people, including our compatriots in Taiwan, to accomplish the great task of reunifying the motherland'. Thus, most students from Mainland China do believe Taiwan is part of China, and consider this belief as part of their Chinese nationality. However, not every student from Taiwan agrees with this, since Taiwan is actually a self-governing island. Most Taiwanese students in Britain are the offspring of Chinese immigrants, who speak Mandarin, and share the same Confucianism centred Chinese culture with students from Mainland China. Studying in the language school provided the six participants the chance to meet and interact with students from Taiwan both in the classroom and outside the classroom. They started to learn how people from different cultural/national backgrounds or political backgrounds view the Taiwan issue, and they might also find that some aspects of their national identities were challenged in unanticipated ways. For example, in the class of 07/11/2005, the argument on the Taiwan issue was raised unexpectedly when a male English teacher, Carl, asked the students to do self introductions,

Carl: Where do you come from?

Jin: I come from China.

Carl: You are not Taiwanese?

Zhu: Taiwan is part of China.

Carl: You can't say this to people from Taiwan. If you ask a Taiwanese, 'are you Chinese?' They will say, 'No, I am Taiwanese.'

Zhu: But half of them want to be unified.

Jin: No. In Taiwan, 10% people want to be independent, 10% want to be unified, and others are neutral.

Zhu: Don't tell me Taiwan is not part of China, shit!

Carl: No, no, the problem is not with me. Many Western people are like me, we can't see the difference between China and Taiwan, as they use the same language.

Jin: If you worry about Taiwan, you will worry about Tibet. For many Western people, Tibet is not part of China.

Zhu: I don't worry about Taiwan, Taiwan will be unified in ten years.

Jin: Many people are happy with the current situation. I don't think there will be a war between Mainland and Taiwan.

Zhu: If Taiwan continues to follow America, there will be a war.

...

Carl: I feel very interested in the relationship between China and Taiwan. Some people have strong beliefs, but most people are in the middle. (Observation: audio recordings, 07/11/05)

In the above extract, the English language teacher, Carl, appears not to be sensitive to the national affiliations of each student, and he is not prepared to address this controversial topic cautiously. For Carl, the Taiwan issue is an interesting topic, which can bring out productive argument. While considering that the Taiwan issue is a complicated politic and historical issue, discussing this topic in the classroom might lead to the airing of opposing views, which could threaten the whole group dynamics for the rest of the course, as any opinion might be offensive to learners from different cultural/national or political backgrounds. The different family backgrounds and political positions made Zhu and Jin react to Carl's views in different ways. For Zhu, the Taiwan issue is related to his belief about Chinese national territories, an important element of Chinese national identity (see Section 2.3.2). Thus, Zhu reacted to the challenges to his Chinese national identity with fervent defensiveness. Having a Taiwanese mother caused Jin to have a divided position on

considering Taiwan issue — ‘we are just students, and we are not politicians; there is no need to adhere to such political issues’ (Talk with Jin, 29/04/06). Outside the classroom, Jin made quite a few Taiwanese friends in the language school, and went out with them frequently. On the contrary, Zhu generally did not talk to Taiwanese students. When I was talking with Zhu in front of the school on 12/12/05, a Taiwanese student went by. Zhu called him, ‘Taiwan independence supporter’ in a low and unhappy voice.

Similar to Zhu, Xu had a hostile attitude towards Taiwan independence supporters.

F: Have you decided in which language school you are going to choose to do your foundation course?

Xu: Still Spencer Language School. I consulted their report of the achievement of the students graduated in last year, it’s very strange, that the students from Taiwan were identified as ‘Taiwanese’, how they can do this! It’s ridiculous! Should I call myself ‘Shanxiness’, since I come from Shanxi Province?

...

Xu: I dislike the attitudes and behaviour of the students from Taiwan, I wish we were going to have a war, and take Taiwan back. (Talk with Xu, 07/03/06)

Xu could not accept the word ‘Taiwanese’, which put Taiwan in the same stage as the People Republic of China. In Xu’s mind, Taiwan was a province, which should be treated equally to the other twenty-two provinces in China, including his home province, Shanxi. This uneasiness made him continue to dislike Taiwanese students. His negative attitudes towards Taiwanese students influenced his interaction with them in the language school: he was unwilling to sit next to a Taiwanese student in the classroom, or to do a language learning task with them, and he felt reluctant to talk to them after class.

Yin tried to use a neutral and calm attitude towards students from Taiwan.

F: How about your relationship with the people from Taiwan?

Yin: This is a very difficult question. Some people from Taiwan don't have very strong positions, and don't emphasize they are Taiwanese. But some will. I will try to avoid them. When they emphasize they are Taiwanese, I just smile, and I don't think it's necessary to argue with them. If you argue with them in a tough way, your extreme behaviour will make others dislike you. It's fine if you understand the issue. (Interview with Yin, 14/05/06)

Yin disliked arguing with others on the Taiwan issue, because she thought the students could not make any decision on it. She stated, 'when we come abroad, my opinion on politic topics is seeking common points while reserving difference' (Interview with Yin, 14/05/06). However, Yin could not calm down all the time when she met Taiwanese students.

I once had a small problem with a Taiwanese girl...I once went to my classmate's flat to cook. All of my classmate's flatmates were in the kitchen, one Maldivian, two Japanese, her, and two of her Japanese friends. I talked in Chinese with her. The Maldivian was very curious and asked us, 'do you speak the same language?' I said, 'yes, both of us speak Chinese.' She was very strange, as she said, 'no, they speak Chinese, we speak Minnan Hua.' Then I said, 'oh, Minnan Hua is just a dialect, it's the same dialect that is used in Fujian Province, like both the people in Hong Kong and Guangdong Province speak Cantonese.' The thing I hated mostly was that she always said 'Taiwanese, Taiwanese, Chinese, Chinese'. I think aren't you Chinese? It's very annoying to say 'Taiwan' plus 'ese'. Her words made me very uncomfortable. She distinguished herself so clearly from me in front of the foreigners. (Interview with Yin, 14/05/06)

Yin got angry with this Taiwanese girl for three reasons: firstly, she denied Minnan Hua as a dialect of Chinese language; secondly, she addressed herself as 'Taiwanese', which in Yin's opinion symbolises Taiwan independence; finally, she distinguished herself from 'Chinese' clearly in front of a group of foreigners. For Yin, the Taiwan issue was an internal issue, so the problem should not have been exposed to foreigners. No matter what

kind of feeling Yin had with Taiwanese, Yin still regarded Taiwanese as a part of Chinese. Obviously, the Taiwanese girl did not think so, as she considered Taiwan issue as an international issue, and did not feel intimate with Chinese.

This section shows how the participants' Chinese national identities influence their attitudes towards the Taiwan issues, and their interaction with students from Taiwan. Particularly, when Zhu, Xu and Yin find the element of Chinese national identity — the belief about Taiwan is part of China — is challenged in various contexts in Britain, they react with defensiveness and negative passions, which may ultimately estrange themselves from the encounters who question this belief. One could possibly argue that a successful second language learner should be flexible to 'suspend judgment in favour of gaining access to the perspectives of others' (Kinginger, in press), thus Chinese learners should learn to see things from a different point of view during their English learning journeys in Britain. However, in this case, since many Chinese learners relate national unification to their patriotism, it might be difficult for many Chinese learners to consider 'Taiwan independence' just as an alternative view, and then discuss the Taiwan issue calmly in the language classroom.

5.7 Summary

This chapter indicates how the six participants' national identities are reformed in the context of study abroad. This journey offers them an alternative set of cultural values and way of interpreting the world. They had become more aware of the uniqueness of Chinese

culture and the impact of different values and beliefs on the communication between people from different cultural/national backgrounds. Besides the opportunity of encountering the world, this journey also provides the Chinese learners the opportunity of encountering themselves, particularly their Chinese national identities. In interaction with language teachers, peers and local people, the participants found their assumptions related to national identities were challenged in unfamiliar ways. Particularly, their experiences of meeting Japanese and Taiwanese students in Britain caused them to confront opposing points of view, and re-examine their own attitudes and values based on their national identities.

There is also a strong sense in the data that the participants treated their Chinese national identity as a property, which needed to be displayed and defended both in the language classroom and in other social contexts. Their patriotic stances influenced their attitudes and behaviour towards their encounters in Britain, and their investment in English learning and use. It is interesting to note that the participants' Chinese cultural identification and their investment in learning English and British ways are not mutually exclusive. After confronting an array of cultural adjustments, the participants experienced a change of behaviour, attitudes and values, and finally tended to become multicultural.

Another dimension of this chapter is the discussion of the participants' discursive social interaction. The Chinese learners' national and cultural identities play an important role in their interaction with people from Britain and other countries. Besides the lack of fluency in English, different lifestyles and values appear to be the major difficulties for Chinese learners in forging meaningful social relationship with British and other nationals.

Facing emotional and psychological dilemmas, the Chinese learners chose to seek friendships from their compatriots, even though they understood that grouping together with other Chinese co-nationals would decrease their opportunities of practising English.

It is evidenced in this chapter that during their English learning journeys in Britain, the Chinese learners are simultaneously socialised into the social practices of three communities — native English speaker community, overseas students of other nationalities, and different Chinese-speaking groups. The socialisation practices of these three communities differ from each other in meeting the Chinese learners' different needs and interests. This raises a question as to the narrow nature of second language socialisation theory, which seems to concentrate one-sidedly on socialisation through a second language and socialisation to use a second language, while ignoring the diversity of second language learners' socialisation practices, and thus potentially failing to reflect the complex nature of second language learners' socialisation process in the host society.

Chapter Six: Social Class Identity and Second Language Learning

The findings of the previous two chapters suggest that the Chinese learners' gender identities and national identities shape their investment in English learning and use, and their English learning trajectories. Simultaneously, their gender identities and national identities are negotiated and reconstructed through their experiences of learning and using English in Britain. In this chapter, I will draw on Bourdieu's (1991, 1997) notion of capital to discuss the relationship between social class identity and second language learning (SLL). Bourdieu's (1991, 1997) concepts of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital link people's values, taste, perceptions and cultural practices to their social class interests.

Most Chinese students studying in the UK are from middle and upper-class families, who benefit from the economic development in China (Shen, 2005). Since the ability to study English abroad is often a function of income, the issue of social class ought to be one of central concerns of SLL scholars, but in fact it has been seldom discussed either in SLL literature or in study abroad literature. In this present study, the Chinese learners travelled from the People's Republic of China, a communist country where social class distinctions are underdiscussed, to the UK, a capitalist country in which the notions of superiority and inferiority have a long historical legacy (Devine, 2005). I wondered that the national differences in social class structures might stimulate the Chinese learners to revalue their socioeconomic status. Then, I wanted to explore how these Chinese learners' privileged

social status affected their English learning and living experiences in Britain; and how their social class identities were shaped by their everyday experiences in the classroom and outside the classroom.

Devine and Savage (2005) suggest that the cultural meanings of class include issues of subjectivity, awareness of, perceptions about, and feelings towards class. Accordingly, this chapter will deal with the findings about the six Chinese learners' social class identities from the following perspectives: their awareness of their own socioeconomic status, their perceptions of economic inequalities and part-time jobs, and how social class is expressed in the organisation of friendship. Then the display and reconstruction of social class identities will be discussed both in language classroom context and in various social contexts.

6.1 Awareness of their family class positions

I am aware that social class categories are identified differently in China and in Britain, so the participants' objective class locations (identified by external criteria) may be changed from China to Britain. However, this study is interested in the participants' own perceptions of their social class positions rather than their objective class locations, since objective class locations neither 'generate' people's class identities nor 'sustain' people's class practice (Devine, 2005, p. 141). Moreover, how people identify their class positions might vary from person to person. Accordingly, I asked the participants to classify their families by themselves in the final interview. It seems that income and occupation are no

more the only measures used to defined one's social class, as the data shows that the resources the five participants' used to identify their families' social class status are quite diverse. Lan and Zhu considered themselves as middle class. The way that Lan defined her family class was unbelievably simple,

F: Which class do you think your family belongs to?

Lan: I think middle class.

F: How do you get this idea?

Lan: Because we are neither rich nor poor, we are in the middle. (Interview, 08/06/06)

For Lan, being middle class was equal to being economically average. Zhu also had a vague idea about which class his family belonged to, and he gave his assessment linked to his sister and his spending in Britain.

F: Which class do you think your family belongs to?

Zhu: Middle class.

F: How can you get this idea?

Zhu: I feel so. My elder sister has studied in the UK for several years, and I also study in the UK. In this year, my elder sister is going to do her master's degree, and I am going to do my bachelor's degree. My parents can support two children studying in the UK. So my family should belong to middle class. (Interview, 03/06/06)

The capability to finance two children studying in the UK was the evidence that Zhu used to categorise his family as middle class.

Yin and Fan used the label, 'upper middle class' to denote a high standard of living, which was higher than the average. Yin classified her family according to the materialistic resources of her family.

F: Which class do you think your family belong to?

Yin: Upper middle class.

F: How do you get this idea?

Yin: At least, I needn't worry about food, dress, and I have money to study abroad, so my family at least belongs to upper middle class. (Interview, 14/05/06)

Unlike Yin, who classified her family only according to economic resources, Fan described her family background as upper middle class according to her mother's occupation, self-improvement and values, which reflected her experience in the United States.

I think my family belongs to upper middle class, because my mother has a company, and she has her own career. My mother always brings me some modern ideas. She stayed in the US for one year, so her ideas are very advanced, and more advanced than other parents. (Interview, 13/06/06)

Finally, Xu and Jin described themselves as upper class. Xu did not explain the reasons, because his parents had already divorced, and he was unwilling to talk about his broken family. On the contrary, Jin gave a detailed description of the social class status of his family.

F: Do you think which class your family belongs to?

Jin: I think my family belongs to the upper class, according to the money that my family can earn and the life quality. But my parents don't spend much money, we don't live in a big luxury house, and the cost of living is low. Some people buy big houses, change cars every day, or travel around very frequently. My parents don't do this. They save money compared to other upper-class people...

F: How do you get the idea that your family belongs to upper class?

Jin: Firstly, my family doesn't have any problems paying my study in the UK, and my parents have stable income. Although we live in the middle-class level, but our entire property reaches upper-class level.

F: What do you mean by life quality?

Jin: If my parents feel tired, they can go for holiday. They needn't worry about the bosses' opinions, as they run the business by themselves. They can eat wherever they want. My mother does yoga in the spare time to relax. The more relaxed you feel the better quality of life you have. (Interview, 27/05/06)

Jin emphasised that his parents did not countenance typically upper-class consumption in a way they might have done, but their income allowed them to have a comfortable lifestyle which would be counted as upper class. This extract also shows how cultural practices come to define social class (Skeggs, 2005). Jin classified his family not only according to direct economic issues (owning a house, running a company, stable income, supporting him studying abroad), but also to cultural practices (holidaying freely, eating out, practising yoga). According to Jin, these were upper-class practices. The values that have been attached to each practice can be seen to be based on 'the right knowledge' (Skeggs, 2005, p. 50) — knowing to send the child studying abroad, and to appreciate the relaxed style of life. The right knowledge here is also dependent upon economic resources.

In summary, the six participants classified their families as middle class, upper middle class or upper class, although in some respects, their discussions of their families' standards of living were barely distinguishable from each other. For instance, the capability to afford children studying abroad was the common reference for Zhu, Yin and Jin to identify their families' social class status. Since most of the participants seemed to lack consciousness or comprehensive understanding of class, there might be a gap between their objective class positions and their subjective class identifications. However, it is certain that all six participants came from affluent families with educational aspirations, so they had the opportunities of studying English in Britain. This section suggests that the practice

of learning a second language abroad is regarded as not only an evidence of classifying learners' family social status, but also a way of displaying their social class identities.

6.2 Perceptions of economic inequalities

In the previous section, I have discussed the participants' perceptions of their social class identities formed in China. After the six Chinese learners came to the UK, which is described by Sarup (1996, p. 133, citing Orwell) as 'the most class-ridden country under the sun', the changes in the communities of practice may form considerable impact on their social class identity negotiation. The Chinese learners had various experiences of meeting people who led different levels of life to their own, and perceived the wide gaps between the haves and the have-nots both within a country and among countries in the world. For example, Yin described her dreadful shopping experience in a small shop in the high street in her diary.

December 11, 2005

A snobbish person

Yesterday, I went shopping with Feng and her friend in a small Chinese store, and we were treated unfairly.

The boss complimented foreigners like a dog, and satisfied their requirements one by one; while she ignored us, although we were waiting to buy bottles of sauces. Of course, those Western people had a pile of twenty-pound notes in their hands... (Yin's diary, 11/12/05)

Yin felt she was looked down upon by the boss, and was considered inferior to other foreigners, because she appeared to be a 'poor student' and an unimportant customer. Having this experience, Yin expressed pejorative views about the effects of class on people's lives in Britain, as she wrote, 'the rich people are so arrogant, as if their soles are cleaner than your face; money can turn the sales assistant who just stared at you into a loyal dog' (Yin's diary, 11/01/06).

Unlike Yin, Jin simply admired the very rich people. We had a conversation when we saw a luxury Rolls-Royce parked nearby,

F: Look at the car, it's a Rolls-Royce.

Jin: What is a Rolls-Royce?

F: A very expensive car, and the royal family uses it.

(Two boys wearing a public school's uniform came out the door and got into the car.)

Jin: They also have two children studying in the public schools. How can they be so rich?

F: Come on, your family is quite rich.

Jin: Yes, but there are many people who are richer than my family. My family is in the middle level of rich people. I do feel sorry for the people who are either poor or ugly. (Talk with Jin, 11/06/06)

Even within his concept of 'upper class', Jin distanced himself from the top rich people, who could afford a Rolls-Royce car, and two children's private education. At the same time, he regarded himself as superior to poor people. Similarly, Fan also felt sorry for the people who had harder lives than her.

There are a lot of Thai students in the school now. Every day, at lunch time, they are crowded in the common room, having their lunches which are prepared by their host families. They eat the cheapest white bread, some cheeses, and some chips,

which I have never seen. I feel sorry for them. (Call to Fan, 13/04/06)

Fan also pitied her host family, who probably were middle class in Britain.

Fan: My host family works very hard, but as they are immigrants, they don't live very well.

F: But both of them have proper jobs, and the host father is running a restaurant.

Fan: They have a middle-level life, but they can't reach the upper-class level. (Call to Fan, 17/04/06)

In this extract, Fan was actually making a judgement about her host family's worth according to their occupation and ethnicity. For Fan, only rich white British people's lives were valuable in Britain.

Although Jin and Fan were not arrogant, from their speech, I can see a clear sense of entitlement, of feeling that it was natural and given that they would be among the affluent. When they met people from lower economic status than them, they did not question why those people were poorer, as it was a natural order of the universe. Yin was the only one who made critical comments on the gaps between the rich and the poor, as she had experienced the discrimination directly deriving from economic inequalities in Britain, despite that fact that she came from an affluent family in China. Maybe underneath is the issue that some participants' social class status is not recognised by the people around? To sum up, the Chinese learners' perceptions of economic inequalities reflect their senses of their superior and privileged social class identities, their desires of gaining respect of those around them in terms of their social status, and their general lack of understanding of people from less privileged social classes.

6.3 Perceptions of part-time jobs

Besides their perceptions of economic inequalities, the Chinese learners' senses of their superior and privileged social class identities are evident in their perceptions of part-time jobs. With an average debt of over 12,000 pounds, many British students are forced to take part-time employment to pay their living fees and tuitions fees (Shen, 2005). While for the young Chinese learners, who are sponsored by their parents, taking a part-time job during the journey of study abroad is generally regarded as a way of learning to live independently (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006). As Zhu, the only participant in my case study who did a part-time job, stated in the final interview,

I am 22 now, I think I should be able to support myself, and earn some money. Working as a part-time cleaner in the hospital is the first time that I earned money. You don't know how happy I was when I got the salary the first time. I called my elder sister, and told her that I had gotten my first-week's salary, although it's just 88 pounds. This is the first time that I earned money. I was really very happy. This is the first barrel of gold in my life. (Interview, 03/06/06)

Zhu seemed to appreciate the first working experience more than the amount of money he had earned. The salary might not be significant compared to the huge cost of study and living in Britain, but it signifies Zhu's first step of becoming financially independent.

Slightly different from Zhu, Fan considered doing a part-time job as a way of gaining pocket money.

I want to earn some money and buy something. When I see something I want to buy, I don't have to consider whether it's too expensive or not. I feel very happy when I spend my own money. (Interview, 13/06/06)

This extract illustrates Fan's desire of achieving some financial independence, which would allow her to spend the money freely. I wonder if spending her own money might momentarily relieve Fan from considering the efforts her parents have made to support her study in Britain.

Besides the financial orientation, the participants aspired to gain opportunities of interacting with British people during their part-time jobs. For example, the local hospital became the only reliable context for Zhu to meet and to communicate regularly with British people outside the language classroom. Lan thought that doing a part-time job would help her to practise her English language skills and to adapt to the life in Britain besides earning some money.

F: Why do you want to find a part-time job?

Lan: Because the study here is not busy, and I have plenty of free time. If you find a part-time job here, you can get familiar with the life style here, practise your English, and earn some money. You can save your parents' money. (Interview, 08/06/06)

Similar to Lan, Xu also considered that doing a part-time job, typically in a foreign enterprise, would be beneficial for him in terms of improving his English and understanding British people's life styles.

If I try to find a part-time job, I will not try a Chinese restaurant in terms of money and language. Generally speaking, the owners of Chinese restaurants are very mean;

furthermore, if I work in a British restaurant or somewhere else, I will have more chances to know British people's lives. This is good for my English. (Interview, 24/05/06)

Within my own experience of being a Chinese student in Britain, I notice that the part-time jobs most Chinese students can find are in low-paying service occupations, such as cashier, cleaner, waiting staff, kitchen help or social care workers. These types of jobs might not match the participants' previous lifestyles and social class identities, and thus coping with part-time work could possibly be both a physical and psychological challenge for them. It seems that the participants in this study do not worry about whether doing these low-paying part-time jobs may undermine their social class identities, perhaps because they tend to regard themselves as temporary participants in British society, who are not subject to the social class stratification in Britain. Therefore, the participants still chose to take or intended to take part-time jobs in regard to developing their capabilities of living independently and gaining access to native English speakers. Compared to these two reasons, the direct financial rewards of doing part-time work appear to be less valuable for the participants, who have no financial burdens. In short, the participants' perceptions of their superior social class identities apparently contribute to their positive attitudes towards part-time work, which could become a potential site for learning and practising English.

6.4 The impact of social class identity on friendship

Since social class identity is not only a label of one's socioeconomic status, but a claim for

recognition, and for differentiating oneself from others (Devine and Savage, 2005), Chinese learners' social class identities have a great impact on their social interaction in Britain. For example, although Zhu did not intend to use class as a rule to judge others, he could not accept others, who considered him as inferior just because they came from more privileged families, as his friends.

If I treat you as my friend, but you think I come from a different class from you, then we can't be friends anymore. If you think I come from lower class than you, and you always behave as a superior, I wouldn't be your friend. You have nothing to show off, since all the things you have now come from your parents. (Interview, 03/06/06)

It appears that Zhu thinks others' perceptions of and attitudes towards his social class identity determine the possibility of developing friendship. Moreover, Zhu had a negative attitude towards the 'arrogant' young people from upper-class families. All of this contributed to the bad relationship between Zhu and his Russian classmate, Ivan, as it was evidenced in the following incident: before the class of 21/11/05, Ke, a female Chinese student, wanted to change her seat with Zhu.

Ke: Zhu, can I exchange my seat with you, because I feel quite cold sitting here.

Zhu: No, I don't want to sit next to Ivan.

F: Why?

Zhu: He is very snobbish. He only likes rich people, and looks down upon poor people. (Observation: field notes, 21/11/05)

Zhu refused to do pair work with Ivan, and even when the teacher, Sandra, asked them to check the answers of a reading task together, Zhu insisted on doing the exercise alone. For

Zhu, Ivan was a snob, and regarded himself as superior to people from lower classes. This perception had a bad influence on Zhu's participation in classroom activities.

Unlike Zhu, who addressed equal treatment in friendship despite different social class backgrounds, Fan and Xu emphasised the importance of similar social class backgrounds in friendship. Fan stated clearly that class would only influence her making good friends, but not making acquaintances.

F: You mentioned that people should make friends with the people from a similar class just now.

Fan: No. I mean making good friends with the people from a similar class. So when you say something in your position, they don't say something in very different positions. If they are in higher positions, they think you should understand something, which you actually don't understand...My current friends have mixed family backgrounds, and they belong to different classes. I feel we still can communicate, if we try to understand each other. (Interview, 13/06/06)

It appears that Fan's close friendship was constrained by social class status. She would only choose friends from middle class, because the lack of shared values might cause difficulties in communication. At the same time, she tended to distance herself from the idea that she was snobbish, as she had friends from different social classes.

Very similar to Fan, Xu thought it was natural to make friends, especially good friends, from a similar social class.

Xu: We always have different habits, as we have different life experiences. It's quite reasonable to make friends with people who have similar backgrounds...

F: How about just becoming very ordinary friends?

Xu: You can just be very ordinary friends, but you can't develop close friendship, as you don't have shared interests. For example, some classmates like famous brands, and then you can't go shopping with them. Firstly, you may have economic

pressure. Secondly, you have different ideas; you think it's not necessary to buy so expensive clothes. Some students need to inherit their family companies when they go back; some students need to do part-time jobs, or study hard, so they don't have much time to accompany others to play around. For friends, shared interests are important, similar class backgrounds are also important, although this sounds quite cruel.

F: Did you have this idea in China?

Xu: I had a bit, but not as strong as now. (Interview, 24/05/06)

The above extract provides three important insights: firstly, for Xu, similar economic status and shared interests are important in developing friendships; secondly, differences in family socioeconomic status can result in students living in different ways in Britain, and these different lifestyles can become another difficulty for developing friendships; finally, Xu enhanced his understanding of the impact of social class on friendship after meeting people from different economic backgrounds in the language school in Britain. In these terms, I can see on the one hand, how social class constructs Xu's friendship network; and on the other hand, his raised awareness of his social class identity through this experience of making friends in Britain.

The data from this section illustrates that social class status can be a contributing factor in determining Chinese learners' choices of friends, although its operation varies with different individuals: Zhu was seeking friendship based on equality; Fan and Xu would only make close friends with people from similar social classes. It is possible that their standards of making friends may influence their interaction with other students in the language school negatively. Furthermore, the process of developing friendships in Britain made the participants become conscious of their own social class identities.

6.5 Discussing social class issues in the language classroom

So far in this chapter, I have discussed how the Chinese learners' social class identities are expressed in their perceptions of economic inequalities outside the classroom, their perceptions of doing part-time work, and their organisation of friendship. Now, I turn to look at how their social class identities are expressed and negotiated in language classrooms. Several issues that I have raised in previous sections were also discussed in the classroom, such as cultural practices in relation to socioeconomic status, and social inequality in terms of status hierarchy. For example, in the class of 02/11/05, the teacher asked the students to guess what would be presented in the lecture on global warming in the tape recording,

(Carl is a male English teacher; Kim is a female South Korean student; Ivan is a male Russian student.)

Carl: What can we do?

Kim: We shouldn't use cars, air conditioners, but we need them.

Carl: Do you need a car? Do you need a car to survive in South Korea?

Jin: We can take buses and taxis.

Zhu: No, it's important.

Carl: How about you, Ivan? Is a car expensive in Russia? Like a second-hand car.

Ivan: It depends. A BMW... (all the other students are laughing)

Carl: How about Lan?

Lan: Yes.

Carl: Why is it necessary?

Lan: Wherever you go, you need a car.

Carl: Even to go shopping?

Lan: If the shop is far away.

Carl: Do many people drive to work?

Jin: Ordinary people can't afford a car; they have to go to work by bus or bicycle.

Carl: So people above middle class would prefer driving a car. (Observation: audio recordings, 02/11/05)

The data showed that the three Chinese students' opinions on whether a car is necessary or not were various. Zhu and Lan thought that life would be unbearable without cars, since they had already got used to living with cars. While influenced by his family's lifestyle, Jin thought it was fine to travel by buses and taxis. Despite the students' various attitudes, the discussion on owning private cars reflected assumption that cars were associated with middle-class culture.

It seemed that in talking about English culture and society, class marked cultural practices and the gaps between haves and have-nots would be naturally discussed. In the class of 21/03/06, the students were required to listen to the tape recorder and read the text on 'Style — Ralph Lauren',

(Alda is a female British Filipino teacher; Mehmet is a male Turkish student; Sun is a female South Korean student.)

Alda: Do you know Ralph Lauren?

Mehmet: Yes.

Alda: Do you have the brand in Turkey?

Mehmet: Yes.

Alda: In Korea?

Sun: Yes, I bought clothes for my children there. It's quite expensive.

Alda: Do you have Ralph Lauren in China?

Xu: I don't know. (Observation: field notes, 21/03/06)

During the conversation, Xu became the only one who lacked the knowledge of Ralph Lauren, an American fashion brand. However, he could pick up the information about Ralph Lauren quickly from the teaching materials, his language teacher and his classmates to establish his middle-class taste.

In later class, Alda picked up the word ‘upmarket’, and explained it to the students.

Alda: Who is upmarket? The film star, like Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. They buy a dress with 20, 000 pounds. Will I buy a dress for 20, 000 pounds? That means I have to work for 2 years to pay for it.

Students: No.

Alda: Some students with dad’s credit card are also upmarket...

...

Alda: Who has been to New Bond Street?

Xu: Me.

Alda: What do they have there?

Xu: Every famous brand.

Alda: It’s called a designer’s street, an ultra fashionable place. Another part of London is also very expensive?

Xu: Oxford Road.

Alda: No, it’s Sloane Street in Kensington. Princess Diana used to shop there. You can see rich ladies with little dogs in their handbags. (Observation: audio recordings, 21/03/06)

The information given by Alda and what Xu saw in New Bond Street helped to form a vivid picture of upper-class people’s shopping style. Neither the teacher nor the students made any comment on economic inequalities, which might imply that none of them questioned why the social inequalities were as they were and how they could be changed.

In another example, in the class of 31/10/05, the teacher, Sandra wrote ‘poverty’ and ‘crime’, and ‘education’ and ‘crime’ on the blackboard to illustrate the meaning and use of ‘positive correlation’ and ‘negative correlation’.

(Sandra is a female English teacher.)

Sandra: What do you think of the relation between ‘poverty’ and ‘crime’? Just guess the relation.

Lan: If you are poor, you tend to commit a crime.

Jin: Yes. (Fan nodded)

Sandra: So ‘poverty’ and ‘crime’ have a ‘positive correlation’.

Zhu: Educated people have fewer probabilities to commit a crime.

Sandra: So 'education' and 'crime' have a 'negative correlation'. (Observation: field notes, 31/10/05)

I felt uneasy when I heard this conversation in the classroom, since no one disagreed with the 'positive correlation' between 'poverty' and 'crime'. It is likely to be oversimplistic to address the 'positive correlation' between 'poverty' and 'crime' without mentioning other possibilities, or explaining the reasons. Since all four Chinese students came from affluent families, they probably felt comfortable in criticising poor people, who 'tend to commit a crime'.

As I argued in Chapter Two, SLL is not just about learning grammar and pronunciation of the target language; it is related to the social context in which the language classroom operates. Sandra's interpretation of the relationship between 'poverty' and 'crime' exemplifies the 'propertising of culture' (Skeggs, 2005, p. 64) in Britain — 'being poor becomes represented as a cultural deficiency, as individualised, as a problem of dispositions, of not being able to become the right person' (Skeggs, 2005, p. 64, citing Sayer).

Moreover, the language teacher's ideological beliefs could influence the students in various ways, such as in this case, Sandra tended to support the students' answers, and ignored the possibility that the students' answers might also be an example of class discrimination. In this lesson, the students might have had their biased beliefs confined, and take them as middle-class or upper-class appropriate attitudes. The lesson may have served to confirm their middle-class attitudes.

All the four examples presented in this section appear to focus on middle-class or

upper-class culture and stance in Britain. In fact, I failed to find any classroom discussion which addressed lower-class culture in my field notes. It is possible that the language teacher might be constrained by their own social biases and the teaching materials, which only reflect middle-class values. These could lead language teachers to focus on middle-class culture, while overlooking the realities of social inequality. I would agree with Vandrick (2006), who advocates that second language instructors need to educate the privileged students to be analytic, critical and aware, and help them to understand their own privileged position, and its implications and consequent responsibilities. The profoundest question I want to make here may be the one of balancing the efforts to educate for success and to educate for responsibility.

6.6 Social class identity and consumption

Besides classroom interaction, the Chinese learners' social class identities are also displayed and negotiated in their consumption behaviour outside the language classroom. People's identities are influenced by what they consume, what they wear, and what commodities they buy (Sarup, 1996, p. 105). Thus, consumption is significant in shaping social class identities. 'Consumption is a mode of being', and 'a way of gaining identity' (Sarup, 1996, p. 105), and this section will discuss how the participants change their consumption practices in Britain.

6.6.1 Changing consumption of fashion

Sarup (1996) suggests that people often want prestige in certain areas than others. In my data, I found two areas of interest with regard to consumption and social status: fashion and food. It seems that the participants incline to spend more money on fashion to signify their social class identities. For example, Xu sought to gain prestige from shopping for the world famous brands. After he had been in Britain for three months, Xu only wore the clothes he had bought in London. During the break time on 28/02/06, he showed me his new Gucci necklace, which cost him 150 pounds.

F: It's so expensive, but just looks fine, not amazing.

Xu: I bought this one because of its brand. (Talk with Xu, 28/02/06)

It seems that Xu chose to buy the Gucci necklace, because of its 'sign value', the socially-constructed prestige value, rather than its 'use value', which is defined by the daily use and enjoyment (Sarup, 1996, p. 108). Since consumer societies are constituted by hierarchies of sign values, one's social standing and prestige are determined by where they stand within the system of consumption (Sarup, 1996). Gucci's relative prestige over other brands symbolised Xu's prestigious social standing. It is important to point out here that Xu developed his appetite for famous brands in Britain.

F: You have been to New Bond Street. How did you feel about it?

Xu: I felt I was really poor. All the cars parking in the street are famous and luxury cars, such as Rolls Royce and Bentley. All the brands there are the top brands in the world. I had no idea about these famous brand clothes before I came to Britain. (Talk with Xu, 21/03/06)

Studying English in Britain provided Xu the opportunities to get familiar with the famous brands: he could learn the information about the brands in the language classroom (see Section 6.5); or he could see the brands in New Bond Street. Similar to Xu, Yin described how she started to become aware of fashion brands during her journey in Britain.

F: Do you spend more money on clothes in Britain or in China?

Yin: Of course, in Britain. Because the general price is higher here, and I also buy more expensive labels.

F: Why do you buy more expensive brand clothes?

Yin: When I was in China, I did not care about the brands. But when I came to Britain, the people around me frequently talked about the brands, and I saw the advertisements of the expensive brands on TV. If I go to the high street, I can see the chain shops of these brands again. So I started to buy them. (Call to Yin, 15/05/06)

This extract suggests that Yin's association with brands were influenced by her peer group, the media, and the shopping environment in Britain. Yin's rising awareness of brands may have contributed to her consciousness of her social class status.

The following is another example of peer influence on consumption of dress: Fan was teased by her Chinese classmates for her lack of knowledge of 'Miss Sixty', one of the most well-known female brands around the world.

(Ke is a female Chinese student; You is a female Chinese student.)

Ke: You, your jeans are similar to mine. Where did you buy them?

You: In China.

Ke: How much were they?

You: I forget.

Ke: I want to see if they are cheaper to buy them in England or in China.

Fan: They must be cheaper in China.

Ke: I don't think so. 'Miss Sixty' rarely offers a discount in China. But at Christmas, you could buy them at half price in Fenwick.

Fan: Lan, we are country bumpkins. We have no idea about the brand of 'Miss Sixty'. (Observation: field notes, 20/02/06)

The above extract illustrates the link between consumption and social class identity: individuals may gain identity and prestige through display of commodities (Sarup, 1996). Moreover, consumerism requires a vast labour to learn about the products, and consumption signifies one's membership of the society (Sarup, 1996). Fan's lack of knowledge of the brand, which was made evident by her two classmates, risked her middle-class social status, as she sarcastically called herself a 'country bumpkin'.

One of the most important functions of dress is as a status signal, since the choice of dress often relates to the choice of images (Sarap, 1996). Accordingly, what the participants chose to wear may signify who they think they are. During their English learning journeys in Britain, the participants had increased their awareness of the symbolic values of brands and the link between the sign values and social class status, and they became more conscious of using commodities to indicate their privileged social status. The participants intended to spend more money on stylish brand clothes to establish their social class identities, because of the impact of the materials used by language teachers, peer pressure, the media, and the social environment.

6.6.2 Changing consumption of food

In contrast to an upward trend in consumption of dress, the data indicates a downward

trend in consumption of food during the participants' journeys in Britain. For example, in the first week of studying in Crawley Language School, Jin went to a restaurant to have lunch every day, which cost him around ten pounds per day. Then Jin bought his lunch from Marks & Spencer. Two months later, in order to save money, Jin tended to buy his lunch in Tesco, which is cheaper than Marks & Spencer. After the class on 9 February 2006, Jin took out a box of instant noodles from his bag.

F: Great, you know to save money now, not like in the beginning, you went to a restaurant to have lunch.

Jin: Yes, I only spent 1 pound and 90 pence on my lunch yesterday, and I have decided to save money at my university. (Talk with Jin, 09/02/06)

From October 2005 to February 2006, Jin had experienced eating at a restaurant, buying Marks & Spencer ready-meals, buying Tesco ready-meals, and having instant noodles for lunch. Jin started to consider his daily spending on food seriously, because the cost of living in Britain was much more expensive than China. From an informal conversation, I discovered that Jin's eating standard in Britain was much lower than the one he had in China. On 29 April 2006, Jin came to visit me, and we cooked dinner together.

F: You are good at cooking?

Jin: Yes, I can cook both Chinese food and Korean food. When I am in the university, I can cook for myself, and it can save money.

F: How did you learn it?

Jin: My parents hired a cook to cook for me when I was at home, and I learnt it from him. (Talk with Jin, 29/04/06)

Developing an appetite for English cuisine is a big challenge for many Chinese learners in

Britain, so having cooking skills is an essential element of surviving in Britain. For Jin, this has also been a process of shifting from being served by a professional cook to cooking for himself. I was aware that Jin was proud of his sense of saving money, a possible way of portraying himself as un-snobbish.

Like Jin, Xu also changed his eating habits in Britain as time went on. Spencer Language School requires students to have lunch and dinner in the school canteen, and the fees include the cost. Xu chose to have dinner at a restaurant to satisfy his appetite in the first two months. After Christmas, Xu tended to have dinner in the canteen two or three times a week. When I finished a classroom observation in an afternoon of March 2006, I asked him why he was leaving in a hurry.

Xu: A group of new students arrived recently. I have to go to the canteen quickly; otherwise, no food will be left.

F: What? Why don't you eat at a restaurant?

Xu: It's too costly, and I have spent too much money before. Although the food in the canteen is really awful, I have to eat in the canteen to save a bit of money. (Talk with Xu, 07/03/06)

Although his family did not restrict him financially, Xu decided to spend less money, because he thought, 'I have used my parents' money in the past, I am going to continue using their money in the next several years, and the cost of living in the UK is quite expensive' (Interview, 24/05/06). It is interesting to notice that on the one hand, Xu tended to spend plenty of money on famous brand clothes (see Section 6.6.1); but on the other hand, he was trying to save a little money on food, a way of showing his appreciation of his parents' financial support.

Another example of how the students changed their attitudes and consumption behaviour can be found in Yin's diary entry.

January 24, 2006

My mother said that I had become mature

.... My mother asked me, 'why don't you eat out? Although an £18 beefsteak is slightly expensive, you can eat once a week. Your father has given you enough money.'

I said, 'I want to save the money, because I am afraid that I may not be able to find a good job, and I can't support you later.'

My mother laughed at me, 'my extravagant daughter, who once wanted to eat sushi and beefsteak every day, finally knows to save money now.'

I can't tell her that I even eat the food, which is out of date, but has not gone bad.
(Yin's diary, 24/01/06)

This diary entry exemplifies the dramatic change that has happened to Yin's consumption of food: from eating out at a restaurant in China to cooking at home in Britain; from eating sushi and beefsteak in China to eating out-of-date food in Britain. One reason for the change might be because the cost of food and eating out in Britain is more expensive than in China. The other reason, as the title of this diary entry suggests, could be that living independently in Britain has made Yin become mature, and she has started to think about her future financial situation seriously.

It seems that most of the elements that influenced the participants to spend more money on dress are absent from the consumption of food: firstly, language teachers seem to have little interest in discussing class rules of food consumption in the classroom;

secondly, the participants do not feel obligated to compete with their classmates in food consumption, as they usually eat privately; thirdly, on the whole, little attention is given to food in English culture, as Fox (2004) describes the relationship between the English and food is like an ‘uneasy, uncommitted cohabitation’ (p. 296); fourthly, saving money on food is presented as a signal of being mature and considerate; finally, it appears to me that the participants treat saving money on food as a ‘painkiller’, which makes them feel less guilty about spending their parents’ money in studying in the UK. Some of these elements may contribute to Jin, Xu and Fan’s less spending on food. They did not see the need for gaining prestige in food consumption through the quality and expense of the food they ate.

6.6.3 A counter example: Jun’s changing consumption practices in Britain

Unlike other participants’ contradictory consumption practices I discussed in the above two sections, Zhu was very conscious of his routine shopping, and he even spent less money monthly than he spent in China.

I do a part-time job every day, and I can earn 350 pounds per month, and I live on this money. So far I have only overspent 100 pounds, as I went to London every month, and I bought some clothes. I had been here for nearly eight months, and I supported myself. Except 200 pounds for the rent, I only spent 150 pounds, which equals to 1,500 RMB. I used to spend 10,000 RMB, at least 4,000 RMB per month in China, but I only spent 1,500 RMB here. (Interview, 03/06/06)

The experience of doing a part-time job could be the first reason that Zhu changed his spending habits in Britain, as he realised the difficulty of making money.

I have to take the class for the whole day. After I finish my class at 4:30 pm, I have to run in a hurry. I can't stay even for one minute; otherwise, I will be late. I have to do this every time, and I am really very tired. (Interview, 03/06/06)

The second reason could be that Zhu was highly influenced by his father's working-class background. Compared to other participants' parents, Zhu's father had made his way up from a much more humble class background, as he started his career as a builder. Perceiving the great effort that his father had made to achieve his current social status, such as the difficulties that his parents experienced in doing business, Zhu felt that he owed his parents a lot, so he chose to do a part-time job to relieve the heavy financial burden on his parents, although his family was capable of supporting both his sister and him studying in Britain.

I think I owe my parents so much. I spent too much of their money. They don't earn money easily. You know, it's normal to beg the leaders for running a building project. I am 22 now, and I am just doing a foundation course. My parents are going to be 50, but they still work hard for me. (Interview, 03/06/06)

This example illustrates that besides the individual's current social status, their own life experiences and their experiences of social mobility may also influence their consumption practices. Thus, Zhu chose to buy cheap clothes, even when he could perfectly well afford expensive brands. He did not feel that he had to establish his middle-class social status through his appearance during his English learning journey in Britain.

6.7 Summary

In what follows, I would like to summarise some possible answers to my research questions and reflect on what can be gained by studying social class identity and SLL. To begin with, this chapter suggests that the English learning journey in Britain is a marker of social class in terms of the high cost of study abroad. All of the participants come from affluent families in China. Their social economic status and self-identified social class positions influences their attitudes towards their encounters and their opportunities to practise English, and structures their friendship network. The participants only attempt to communicate when their thoughts, beliefs and social class status are validated by others with whom they interact.

Subsequently, the participants' senses of their middle-class or upper-class identities were reinforced during their English language journeys in Britain. When they perceived new behaviour and attitudes associated with middle class or upper class in Britain, they tended to adjust themselves socioculturally. For example, on the one hand, Xu, Yin and Fan intended to spend more money on fashion; on the other hand, Jin, Xu and Yin tried to save money on food. Influenced by language teachers, peer pressure, the media, and the social environment in Britain, the participants perceived that there was a link between social prestige and fashion; however, this link seemed to be much less obvious in food consumption. Thus, they chose to wear certain brands to signify their social class identities.

Finally, the data of this chapter suggests that the focus on middle-class culture in the language classroom should be called into question. I would suggest that international

students should be encouraged to think critically; language teachers also need to think about the messages they are projecting, and to raise awareness of social classes and social inequalities in the content of published materials and their experiences. In this way, English language teaching will perhaps assist and inspire students to combine concern and compassion with critical thinking and analysis.

Chapter Seven: Language Learner Identity and Legitimate Peripheral Participation

In the previous three chapters, I have already discussed a range of socially constructed elements in the second language learner's identity, which includes gender, nationality, and social class, and their relationship with second language learning (SLL). This chapter focuses on language learner identity. As I argued in Section 2.4, there is no clear division between language learning and language use, therefore, the participants' language learners' identities are not only constructed in the formal language learning environment, including the language classroom and the language school, but also shaped in various social contexts in which the participants use English for communication, such as their host families, the supermarket and the street. To understand the language learner identities that the Chinese students hold, and how these identities are constructed has important implications.

In this chapter, I take the opportunity to draw on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998), in particular, to analyse the data about the language teachers' promotion and limitation of the Chinese students' participation in British society in relation to their perceptions of the Chinese students' language learner identities. Then I will present how the Chinese students perceive themselves as English language learners and users in relation to their English learning experiences in Britain; finally, I will use a case study to illustrate how a Chinese student struggles with a language school's and language teachers' inappropriate label for him as an EFL learner influenced by the IELTS.

7.1 Language teachers' role in enabling Chinese learners' participation in British society

According to Lave and Wenger's (1991) conception of legitimate peripheral participation, newcomers interact with old-timers in a given community setting, become increasingly experienced in the practices that characterise that community, and gradually move towards full participation in that community. Norton (2001) finds that this conception is suitable in understanding the situation of the language classroom, in which second language learners (newcomers) enter a classroom where language teachers (old-timers) constitute the more experienced members of the community. In this present study, the Chinese learners are the newcomers in Britain, and they need a language course, which can enhance the process of their English learning, and help them adapt to a new society. The English language teachers are the only native speakers of English language in the language classroom. They are experienced community members who already possess necessary linguistic and cultural resources, and can help Chinese learners moving towards full participation in British society. From the evidence of my nine-month classroom observation, I found that language teachers generally use two methods to promote language learners' participation in British society: providing them knowledge of British English language, and familiarising them with the cultural practices of British society.

7.1.1 Presenting British English norms

Since the language classroom is situated in a British English-speaking community, part of the role of a language teacher is to help prepare language learners to understand British English outside the classroom. To achieve this purpose, the language teachers in this study often distinguished British English expressions by using American English expressions as a point of contrast. In the following two examples, the language teachers, Anita and Duncan pointed out the use of ‘chemist’ instead of ‘pharmacy’, and ‘in hospital’ instead of ‘in the hospital’ in British English norms.

Anita: Where do you get medicine?

Xu: Pharmacy.

Anita: That’s an American way. In England, we say ‘chemist’.

(Observation: field notes, 24/01/06)

(Duncan was checking Xu’s writing)

Duncan: You’d better say ‘in hospital’. In America, people say ‘in the hospital’, but in the UK, people usually say ‘in hospital’.

(Observation: field notes, 16/05/06)

In these two conversations, the language teachers introduced British English expressions with statements, such as ‘in England, we say...’ and ‘you’d better say...in the UK’. The language teachers were encouraging the language learners to use British English expressions, but with the use of contrasting American English expressions. In each case, American English norms were presented as less acceptable. This might give the students an impression that they need to use British English expressions to assimilate into British society.

This intention continues to be exemplified in the following extract, in which Duncan,

an American language teacher in Spencer Language School, tried to make himself sound like a British person.

Duncan: I am actually an American.

F: Really? I can't distinguish from your accent.

Duncan: Because I have been in England for more than 10 years. I can imitate British accent, and I try to speak British English to my students. (Talk with Duncan, 18/04/06)

There may be several reasons why Duncan insisted on speaking British English to his students. One possible reason could be that Duncan assumed that the knowledge of British English he provided to his students would allow them to transfer it directly to learning contexts outside the classroom. All the three language teachers' efforts to promote British English norms can help the students to understand the English expressions used in the social context outside the language classroom, and communicate with local interlocutors.

7.1.2 Introducing British cultural practices

As I discussed in Section 2.4.2, learning a new language is always related to learning a new culture. Lave and Wenger (1991) also suggest that through the process of legitimate peripheral participation, newcomers are supposed to acquire the practices of old-timers, which might include how they talk, walk, work, and generally conduct their lives. Accordingly, besides learning English language norms, the Chinese learners also need to learn the cultural practices of British society to become a functional member in the host society. The field notes of my classroom observation suggest that language teachers either

introduce British culture directly to enhance students' understanding of British society, or use British culture as cultural content for English language teaching. In the following two examples, the language teachers, Sally and Carl introduced to their students the knowledge about British houses and British newspapers respectively.

Sally: What's a terraced house? Come on, you have been in terraced houses for several months, and you don't know what a terraced house is?

Fan: You live in a house, and you have neighbours.

Sally: It's a series of houses, and they share walls, which help to save money and space. You can find them in the town. What's a semi-detached house?

Zhu: Two houses together.

Sally: Yes, you can find it further away from the city centre.

Fan: My host family lives in an attached house.

Sally: Where is your host family?

Fan: Near to Ashford.

Sally: Yes, that's a bit far away from the city centre. What's a detached house?

Lan: The house built up alone.

Sally: Yes. You can find it in the countryside, because you have more spaces there, and you can have a big garden. (Observation: audio recordings, 13/03/06)

In this extract, Fan, Zhu and Lan responded to Sally by giving the information about the characteristics of the houses they had lived in or they had seen in Britain. Sally then developed the participants' existing knowledge about British houses by explaining the general locations of different type of houses. This is a good example of how the Chinese learners' British culture learning experiences in the language classroom intersect with their daily life experiences. The following extract also shows how the culture learning happened in the language classroom enhances the kind of learning that takes place in other sites.

(Natalya is a female Russian student)

(Carl wrote down ‘Broad sheet: The Guardian (left), The Daily Telegraph (right);
Tabloids: The Sun (slang, informal), The Mirror (slang, informal), The Daily
Express, The Times (right) on the whiteboard)

Carl: If you are on the left, what are you?

Zhu: Labour.

Carl: And socialists, who always have black moustaches. If you are on the right?

Zhu: Tory.

Carl: Conservative.

Natalya: The Guardian.

Carl: The Guardian is a traditional left party newspaper. (Observation: field notes,
09/03/06)

As I mentioned in Section 4.5.5, Zhu had a habit of reading British newspapers in terms of his personal interest and his aim of improving his English. In the above classroom discussion, Zhu’s utterances reflect his investment in English language learning outside the classroom. Responsively, Carl corrected Zhu’s misunderstanding, and provided more information about the political backgrounds of these newspapers. In both conversations, the language teachers tended to provide the interpretive support necessary for the students’ increasing understanding of British people’s cultural practices, as well as making sense of their own lives in Britain.

Duff and Uchida (1997) argue that language and culture are inseparable in second language teaching, as culture relates to not only the cultural content of the courses language teachers teach, but also the subtle practices that are characteristic of their teaching. The following two extracts show how the language teachers use British culture to illustrate their teaching tasks. For example, Storm, a female English teacher, taught her students how to use ‘appropriate English’ in the restaurant, in terms of ‘fairly decent’ English table manners (Fox, 2004, p. 295, citing Mikes), as indicated in the following quote,

Storm: You say ‘could I help you?’ it’s politer than ‘may I help you?’

...

Storm: I don’t want a starter, or I don’t feel like a starter.

Xu: 吃顿饭真累!

It is so tiring to have a meal.

...

Storm: Did you enjoy the dinner? You say, ‘it’s fine.’ Or ‘it’s delicious.’ Or ‘it’s great’ if you really like it.

Xu: If I really don’t like the food?

Storm: You say, ‘it’s so so.’ If you really hate it, you can make a complaint. (Observation: field notes, 28/02/06)

In another language class, Anita, a female English teacher, was giving an example on ‘appointment’ to her students.

(Lu is a female Chinese student)

Anita: Appointment. Lu, when your glasses are broken, what will you do?

Lu: I will go to the hospital.

Anita: No, we don’t go to hospital in England.

Lu: Go to glasses shop?

Anita: You need to call them and book a specific time to go to see them.

Xu: You need to make an appointment for everything in Britain. (Observation: field notes, 24/01/06)

In the above two extracts, the language teachers not only taught the students particular phrases, sentence patterns and the meaning of a particular English word, but also taught them the communication skills they need to use and the manners they need to show outside the language classroom. In addition, I would like to consider further Xu’s complaint — ‘it’s so tiring to have a meal!’ and his over-simplistic generalisation — ‘you need to make an appointment for everything in Britain’. I wonder one possible reason for Xu’s impatience to learn ‘appropriate’ English used in a restaurant, and his careless comment on

appointment rules in Britain could be the absence of the language teachers' explanations of the beliefs and values behind these cultural practices. It seems that Xu just do not understand why British people speak English and behave in a certain way, which is the model he is expected to adapt to.

The data presented in this section suggests that language teachers (old-timers) promoted Chinese learners' (newcomers) legitimate peripheral participation in British community by providing them necessary knowledge of British English language norms and useful information about cultural practices of British society. However, moving towards full participation in a certain community is more than learning pre-given knowledge and sets of skills; it also requires access to a wide range of activities and opportunities for participation in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In other words, the issue of access is crucial to the process of legitimate peripheral participation. Sometimes, newcomers' access to participation may not be addressed in the language classroom. As I will discuss in the next section, some language teachers' practice, influenced by the IELTS, and the necessity of getting students to a required level, may not support Chinese learners' legitimate participation in British society.

7.2 Language teachers' role of discouraging Chinese learners' participation in British society

The data presented in the previous section appears to suggest that language teachers tend to teach English as a national language, which is embedded in British culture, rather than an

international language in the language classroom, and so part of their role is to help students adapt to British society. This is one of the principal reasons that international students come to Britain to learn English in readiness for their further academic studies in British universities. At the same time, all the Chinese learners who participated in this present study had to take the IELTS test, the results of which is important for their applications to study in a British university. So language schools often arrange an intensive IELTS course for the students, for instance, in Crawley Language School, Jin, Zhu, Fan and Lan were required to take a two and a half hours IELTS course in the afternoon from Monday to Thursday, from January to May in 2006. Driven by these two different orientation simultaneously, some language teachers seem to be caught in a dilemma: on the one hand, they treat Chinese learners as potential members of British community, and thus tend to teach them English as a second language; on the other hand, they treat them as international/foreign candidates for the IELTS test, and accordingly, teach them English as a foreign language.

In contrast to the data presented in the proceeding section, the data presented in this section will illustrate how language teachers address Chinese learners as foreign learners or non-native speakers in the language classroom, and thus apparently keep them as outsiders to British community. For example, in the class of the IELTS course on 30/01/06, Sally, a female English teacher, tried to explain the difference between the flexible English forms that British people actually use and the Standard English forms that language students are expected to use.

Sally: Can I mention one thing? Don't use possessive case, that is 's' with things, like 'city's population'. Use it with living things. Although you can see some journalists use this form with things, because they want to put more words in. But you'd better not use possessive case with things. (Observation: field notes, 30/01/06)

It might be argued that in this extract, Sally was trying to explain the different rules for language use in different contexts. However, without making this point clearly, the impression Sally gave could be that although the students might acquire possessive case with things outside the language classroom, they were not advised to use it in a similar way as native speakers might do.

Moreover, the Chinese learners' identities of being foreign 'IELTS candidates' were not only emphasised by language teachers in IELTS classes, but were also occasionally addressed by language teachers in other language courses. For example, in the class of Pre-intermediate English Course on 07/02/06, Von, a female British Indonesian teacher, explained the grammar rule that the students had to follow was different from the norms used by native speakers.

Von: 'I've been living here for seven years.' This is to stress that I am planning to move. 'I have lived here for seven years' doesn't have this implication. We mix these two expressions together, but you should be aware of the difference in the IELTS exam. (Observation: field notes, 07/02/06)

According to Von, native speakers could ignore the difference between the two expressions, while the non-native students could not, as the students had to meet the requirements of the IELTS test.

The different use of English between native English speakers and non-native English

speakers is also illustrated in the following example, in which Sandra, the English teacher explained to Fan why she could not pronounce species as ['spi:fiz] in her class of Access Course on 26/01/06.

Fan: Is it species ['spi:fiz] or ['spi:siz]?

Sandra: Both are ok.

Fan: But when I said ['spi:fiz], Ann (a British staff in the language school) pointed out that I was wrong, and others were looking at me.

Sandra: I think if you were a native, no one would stop you. (Observation: field notes, 26/01/06)

In the extract, Sandra pointed out the difference in using English between native speakers and non-native speakers, as native speakers have the right to pronounce species as either ['spi:fiz] or ['spi:siz], while Fan's pronouncing species as ['spi:fiz] might be considered as incorrect or unacceptable. It seems that non-native speakers have 'no right' to fully use the linguistic norms that the native speakers hold, and they are expected to use the standard form instead of variations of English language.

In the first two extracts of this section, the language teachers tried to help the students with the IELTS test preparation. Since the IELTS test is designed for testing English as an international language, the students who take the IELTS course are automatically treated as international/foreign students, although they are actually living in an English-speaking community. The strong impact of the IELTS seems to contribute to language teachers making a distinction between 'we', native speakers, and 'you', non-native speakers students frequently: 'we' can use the varieties of English norms, including forms of English which contains parochial or casual features, while 'you' can only use the norms of

Standard English. In this way, Chinese learners' access to the use of variety of English norms is limited, and their movements towards full participation in British society are likely to be constrained.

One could claim that Chinese learners studying in Britain are actually non-native English speakers and foreign learners. However, many researchers argue that this dichotomy between native speaker and non-native speaker affects the power relationship between the language teacher and the student: the teachers determine what is legitimate, and who is legitimate (Blackledge, 2001); as well as 'who is in', 'who is out', 'how to be' or 'how to act' (Sarangi and Roberts, 2002, p. 197); and as a result, the student is either discouraged or prevented from becoming a full legitimate speaker of English. As Jenkins (2000, p. 11) notes, 'it is not possible to label someone as a "foreigner" or a "non-native" and believe that he or she has equal rights to the language'. Therefore, treating Chinese learners as non-native English speakers and foreign learners in the language classroom may set up barriers to Chinese learners' success in English language learning in Britain, particularly for those who wish to participate more fully in British society.

7.3 Language teachers' categorisation of students

The above two sections have discussed how language teachers promote Chinese learners' participation in British society by offering the knowledge of British English language, British culture and communication skills, and how language teachers discourage Chinese learners' participation in British society by limiting their access to certain varieties of

British English norms. Moving towards full participation in communities of practice involves not just learning knowledge and a set of skills of practice, but more significantly, gaining ‘an increasing sense of identity as a master practitioner’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 111). In this present study, I regard the Chinese learners’ moving towards full participation in British society as associated with their increasing senses of identity as adept English speakers. Thus, I will explore the language teachers’ perceptions of the Chinese learners’ identities in term of their relationship with English language.

Norton (1997, p. 424, citing Ndebele) considers naming as a political act: ‘the namer isolates the names, explains them, contains them, and controls them’. Accordingly, I asked four language teachers to categorise their students to find out their perceptions of the students’ language learners’ identities and language abilities, and their expectations of the students’ linguistic achievement. Three of them tended to label their Chinese students as EFL learners, although their reasons were different or even contradictory from each other. In the following example, Duncan, a male American teacher, showed some hedging in response to my request.

F: In your class, the students come from various countries, and learn English in England, do you treat them as ESL learners or EFL learners?

...

Duncan: I would consider them as EFL learners. I am actually an American... I once taught English in Japan, and the Japanese students used to talk about something in Japan to me. Then I came to England...I met students from various countries, and got to know many things I would never know. (Talk with Duncan, 18/04/06)

When I read this extract, I could not find the direct evidence to support Duncan’s

categorisation. It appeared that Duncan saw a similarity between the situation of Japanese students learning English in Japan and the situation of Chinese students learning English in Britain, because of their non-Western cultures. Since the former situation is usually categorised as an EFL setting (Block, 2003), it is possible that Duncan presumed that the latter situation should also be categorised as an EFL setting, and accordingly, his Chinese students should be labelled as EFL learners.

Joy, an Australian English teacher in Living Language Centre categorised Yin as an EFL learner according to her teaching experiences, her vivid observation, and her own experience as being a foreigner in Britain.

I once taught in X language school, and I had two students from Afghanistan. One had already got permission to stay in the UK, but the other hadn't...The student who had already got the permission learnt English much better than the other, several years later, you couldn't distinguish his foreign accent. He was eager to join British society, in which he would spend his rest of life... As I had been in England for a long time, and I always know that I will go back to Australia, so I keep my Australian accent. The students in this classroom are going to do further degrees in the UK, and they will spend another several years in the UK, and then go back, so they don't have such a desire to join British society. (Talk with Joy, 15/05/06)

For Joy, the students studying in the language school could be divided into two groups: one group represented by the Afghanistan student, who would spend the rest of their lives in Britain, were eager to integrate into British society, and would acquire a British English accent; the other group represented by Yin, who would spend several years studying in Britain, had little motivation to mix with British society, and might not want to acquire a native English accent. Apparently, as the former group was traditionally classified as ESL learners (Block, 2003), Joy tended to identify the latter group as EFL learners.

Similar to Joy, Kate, a female English teacher, also regarded the length of stay in Britain as a benchmark of labelling language learners. In addition, she thought a higher level of linguistic competence was associated with the EFL learner.

F: Do you consider your Chinese students as ESL learners or EFL learners?

Kate: EFL learners.

F: Why?

Kate: Because when most Chinese students arrive in the language school in England, their English levels are already quite good. They are going to stay in the UK for another 3 or 4 years to do a further degree. (Talk with Kate, 16/06/06)

Then Kate compared the group of Chinese students with a group of Arabic students, who had a lower level of linguistic competence.

Kate: There are also a group of Arabic students in the language school, and most of them are in the elementary class. When they arrived, they could only speak several words, which they picked up from some films. They are going to stay in the UK for their rest of lives. (Talk with Kate, 16/06/06)

Kate did not call the group of Arabic students ESL learners; however, they would normally be identified as ESL learners. The way in which Kate connected the labels for language learners to their English proficiency looks confusing, but it appeared clear that the language teacher used labels to signify her students' linguistic competence.

In contrast to Kate, Sandra, a female English teacher, regarded EFL as a label symbolised 'deficient' in English language. For example, in the class of 23/02/06, when Sandra asked her students to listen to a tape recording, she said

I am not going to treat you as EFL learners, so listen to the tape, and I'm not going to stop it. I would like you listen to the authentic materials, and take notes. (Observation: field notes, 23/02/06)

In this particular situation, the students were free of the 'EFL' category, because they were going to listen to authentic English materials, and they were expected to display a higher level of linguistic competence than EFL learners.

The data presented in this section suggests that the language teachers tend to categorise their students by their own ideologies and intuitions, and none of these teachers exhibit a particular awareness of the theoretic debate on the difference between ESL and EFL in the field of TESOL. These language teachers' perceptions of their Chinese students' language learners identities can be summarised as followings: the Chinese students are 'foreign Others' (Holliday, 2005) with non-Western cultural backgrounds; they are only going to stay in Britain for another several years, so they have little motivation to integrate into the host society or acquire a native accent. Accordingly, the language teachers tended to categorise the Chinese students as EFL learners.

7.4 A counter example: Matt's different categorisation of students

Considering the multilayered academic qualification of language teachers working in British language schools (Anderson, 2003), I was not surprised to find out that Matt, a male English teacher, categorised his Chinese students as ESL learners instead of EFL learners.

Because my students normally live in the UK for quite a long time, and in fact often go on to do a degree course over three years, I tend to treat them as ESL learners. Which, for me, means teaching language that might be useful for them in everyday life, which could include functional language (shopping, banking etc); study skills (note taking, giving presentations etc); socialising (pub, restaurant etc) and more general things like having discussions about current news/issues and listening to/viewing off-air programmes and films. I often like to use material that has content as well as language benefits. (Email interview, 07/04/06)

Matt defined his students as ESL learners in terms of their communicative needs: unlike a foreign language learning situation, the students had many opportunities of contact with English outside the classroom, as they needed to use English to exchange information both in academic contexts and in various social contexts; furthermore, they also needed to use English to establish and develop social networking.

This extract exemplifies language teachers' diverse stances: the language teachers who perceive Chinese students as the foreign Other, tend to categorise them as EFL learners (see Section 7.3); while the language teachers like Matt, who see Chinese students as functioning members of British society which they inhabit in and engage with, tend to identify Chinese students as ESL learners, and accordingly, prepare English lessons to help the students to realise their information exchange goals and communication goals, and to integrate into the host society.

Considering the data presented in Section 7.1, one could argue that although most language teachers tended to categorise the Chinese students as EFL learners, they still promoted Chinese learners' participation in British society by engaging them with learning knowledge of everyday practice in Britain. However, I wonder their non-theorised

teaching approach, incoherent teaching practice — teaching English as a second language and as a foreign language simultaneously, and their labelling Chinese students as EFL learners might have negative impact on Chinese learners' English language learning and use outside the language classroom, as I will demonstrate in the next section.

7.5 The negative impact of language teachers' identification of Chinese students as the foreign Other

Language teachers' categorising Chinese students as non-native foreign others might contribute to their beliefs in a double standard in English language use: native speakers follow Norm A, which includes vernacular and casual forms of English; while non-native speaker students are instructed in Norm B, a form of formal Standard English guided by the IELTS test requirements. Living in an English speaking community provides opportunities for the Chinese learner to encounter gaps between Norm A and Norm B.

F: Have you found any difference between the English you learnt in the classroom and the English you acquired outside of classroom?

Xu: Yes.

F: Can you give me an example?

Xu: The English people speak outside of the classroom is more flexible. (Talk with Xu, 07/02/06)

The differences between Norm A and Norm B could result in language learners' confusion in English learning and use, as is evident in the following extract,

Yin: I always think about grammar when I speak English, because I am afraid of making grammar mistakes. But I found that English people also made grammar mistakes when they speak.

F: Why do you think they made grammar mistakes?

Yin: Because the way they speak English is different from what the language teachers taught us in the classroom.

F: Well, it could be 'spoken grammar'.

Yin: I don't know. Sometimes, I am very confused. (Talk with Yin, 08/05/06)

Yin tended to stick to Norm B taught by her language teachers both in the language classroom and outside the language classroom. When she met English people, who followed Norm A outside the language classroom, she was either confused or simply considered the English expressions different from what she learnt in the classroom as mistaken uses of Standard English.

Furthermore, as the students mainly learn Norm B in the language classroom, they will possibly have problems communicating with native English speakers outside the language classroom. For example, when Zhu did his part-time job in a local hospital, he had difficulties understanding his local colleagues.

My colleagues in the hospital are British, the local people. If they speak too quickly, I still can't understand now. They also have accents. But if they talk to me formally, and if I also know the topic, I can understand. When they talk with each other, I am sitting aside, I can't understand. My supervisor often talks to me, I can't understand. She frowns, and I am quite depressed. (Interview, 03/06/06)

The speech that Zhu could not understand has the following characteristics: quickly spoken utterances, local accent, informal grammar, or unfamiliar topic. According to my long-term classroom observation, these elements are usually not addressed by the language teacher. This extract illustrates how the English taught in the language classroom can differ

vastly from the English that language learners' encounter in extra-curricular contexts. As the English classes did not fully address Zhu's communicative needs, it is possible that he might have had little motivation to learn Standard English in the language classroom.

Holliday (2005, p. 19) suggests that 'the Other, capitalized, can be defined as falsely attributed negative or exotic characteristics which are opposite to the positive characteristics of the Self'. Thus, categorising Chinese students as the foreign Other, as less legitimate speakers of English, may set up barriers to their success in English language, as they are prevented from becoming legitimate speakers of English, and owning English language. With senses of being inferior to native speakers, Chinese learners might always worry about their inadequate English, and feel hesitant about speaking English. As Yin described this feeling in her diary,

December 10, 2005

The right of speaking

My English has improved a lot recently. When I sit in the university canteen, I can understand others if they don't use professional words.

The thing that makes me feel scared is that some foreign girls sit next to my friends and me to listen to what we talk about...

I usually have lunch with a Hong Kong aunt, a Malaysian girl, South Korean or Japanese friends. Then I found out that when I spoke English with my friends who cannot speak Chinese, they always laughed at our pronunciation of words. When we spoke Cantonese with several English words, they thought we were very strange.

I feel a bit scared now ~ I feel if I enter the canteen, I am inspected and being laughed at. (Yin's diary, 10/12/05)

Whether these British female students, as Yin called them 'foreign girls', sitting next to

them in the canteen laughed at their pronunciation as Yin described, is not the primary issue here. The significance of the diary entry is that it reveals Yin's insecure feeling in speaking English in front of native English speakers in a public place although her linguistic competence has improved dramatically. The title of this diary entry suggests that speaking English is not only a linguistic issue, but also a political issue, in terms of the unequal power relationship between native English speakers and non-native English speakers. Norton (1997) points out that English language learners would not consider themselves as legitimate speakers unless they could claim their ownership of English language. And without a certain degree of ownership over English, some Chinese students feel they could not use English naturally and casually.

7.6 Chinese students' stances

So far in this chapter, I have discussed language teachers' construction of Chinese students' language learners' identities, but this section will turn to look at Chinese students' own ideological stance towards their language learners' identities, which is often considered to be more significant than the label they are given by others (Higgins, 2003). The Chinese students enrolled in an intensive language course in Britain intend to use English in native speaker contexts, as well as to use English as a lingua franca in interaction with other non-native speakers. (Adolphs, 2005). Compared to immigrant and/or minority language learners, these Chinese students have less pressure to integrate, but they still wish to socialise with British people and participate in British society (see the discussions in

Section 5.3.1 and 5.5.1). These elements might influence the Chinese students' English language learning goals, including their English accent goals. Since accent indicates the social groups speakers belong to or desire to belong to (Levis, 2005), I consider the participants' English accent goals as one indicator of participation and desired learning goals.

In the following extract, Yin regarded British English accent as one of the main attractions of studying English in the UK, especially in England.

F: Do you think the UK is an ideal place for learning English?

Yin: Yes, especially England. I feel the accent here is quite authentic; at least the people you meet speak British English. The people in Scotland have very strong accents. If you go to study English in other countries, such as the US, the English in the US is not traditional English anymore. (Interview, 14/05/06)

Similar to Yin, Xu admired a British English accent, and wanted it for himself.

F: Do you mind your Chinese English accent? Or do you try to imitate a British English accent?

Xu: I try to imitate a British English accent, but the distance still exists, since my first language is not English. I will try my best.

F: Why do you aim in imitating British English?

Xu: When I do something, I should try my best to do it well. Since you come to the UK, you should learn authentic British English.

F: Do you aim to pronounce accurately or acquire a British accent?

Xu: It's the best if I can achieve both. My first aim is to make my pronunciation understandable to others, and my second aim is to speak Standard English.

F: Standard English equals to British English?

Xu: Yeah. (Interview, 24/05/06)

Xu set up two pronunciation goals: the first one is intelligibility, as he sought to be understood despite his speech being foreign accented; the second one is nativeness, as he

aimed to achieve British-like pronunciation in English. Furthermore, Xu felt the need to acquire a British English accent to be identified as a good learner. However, the equation Xu made between Standard English and British English raised the question as to whether he could identify the accent he claimed to want to internalise? The answer appeared to be negative according to the following conversation.

F: So you like your English learning experience here, one reason could be the teachers' English sounds nice?

Xu: Yes, you can hear various accents, and all of them are authentic British English.
(Interview, 24/05/06)

Xu appeared to blindly aspire to a British English accent despite geography, occupation, age and social status differences in British English.

Similar to Xu, Jin also associated native-like accent with English proficiency.

If you speak a second language well, you feel successful. When you speak frequently, your accent and your tone sound native-like, you have no problem in communication, and then you will feel good in speaking the second language.
(Interview, 27/05/06)

Although Munro and Derwing (1999) suggest that communication can be remarkably successful even when foreign accents are noticeable or even strong, Jin believed that a native-like accent could enhance communication competence, and would bring him confidence and comfort in speaking English.

Unlike the other participants, Lan was the only one who did not strive for a native-like accent, although she attained the highest score in the IELTS test among my participants.

F: Do you watch TV here?

Lan: Yes, but sometimes, the TV programmes are not interesting, and I will download some films from the Internet.

F: But American English is spoken in most films.

Lan: I don't care. I can't distinguish between British English and American English very clearly, except a few words. If others can understand me, that's fine. I don't care whether it's American English or British English. Although American English is spoken in the film, it sounds similar to British English, except some stresses.

F: But the accents are quite different.

Lan: I feel they are similar. (Interview, 08/06/06)

During the final interview, Lan asserted that she was not able to distinguish between British English and American English accents, and she did not mind not knowing. Lan put herself in a comfortable position — 'if others can understand me, that's fine'. Intelligibility was the goal Lan set for herself.

The data presented in this section suggests that the participants feel the main goal for their English learning process is mutual intelligibility with both native and non-native speakers. Furthermore, most of the participants aspire to become native-like in their English pronunciation, because a native-like accent can signify them as successful English language learners, and it might also enhance the possibilities for communication and thus help them to integrate into the academic discourse of the university and British society (also see Adolphs, 2005).

Jenkins (2005) claims that the English language learner who desires to sound like a native English speaker wants to identify with native English speakers. Based on his own English learning experience, Kubota (2006) argues that a desire to achieve a particular native-like English accent does not always equate to a desire to become a member of the

target community. In this present study, although the Chinese students intended to go back to China after their studies with regard to their privileged social status in China, they needed to spend several more years continuing studying in British universities. In this long period of time, they had to adapt to British academic discourse and British society in certain ways to succeed in their study abroad journeys. Therefore, they might wish to be identified as neither British nor outsiders to British society, and more importantly, they might want to be considered as valid and legitimate speakers of English language.

7.7 A counter example: Fan's different stance

Like other participants, Fan also wanted to acquire a native-like accent; however, American English was the ideal model that Fan aspired to. Fan's special English learning experience in Britain seems to contribute to her preference for an American English accent. When Fan firstly arrived in England, she spent three month in taking the 'One to One' English course with an American couple.

F: Did you think about coming to the UK to learn British English?

Fan: My pronunciation has an American accent. When I changed host families, they asked me, 'have you stayed in the US?' I said, 'no, but the teacher of my 'One to One' course is an American.' I didn't imagine that I would get an American accent in three months. I prefer an American accent. (Interview, 13/06/06)

Fan's experience of learning American English from an American couple in Britain exemplifies that studying in Britain does not always guarantee the language learner will

acquire a British English accent.

Fan may also have preferred an American English accent to a British English accent because of her positive perceptions of America. As I discussed in Section 4.1.2, Fan was highly influenced by her mother, who once stayed in America for one year. From our informal conversations, I realised that America, for Fan, was a place full of opportunities and modern ideologies.

Besides her desire to sound like an American, Fan perceived herself as a successful bilingual, who could speak both Chinese and English.

In the UK, I feel very proud when I speak English. Although I still have some accent, but not quite much. I feel very proud when I talk to British people. You can't speak my language, but I can speak your language. (Interview, 13/06/06)

Instead of considering herself as a deficient English speaker, Fan's investment in a bilingual identity seems to put her in a superior position over her 'monolingual' British interlocutors.

The example of Fan illustrates the complexity and diversity of Chinese student's language learners' identities. In contrast to Yin, Xu and Jin, who expressed a desire to sound like British English speakers, and to participate in British community, Fan felt comfortable with her distinguishable American English accent, which would satisfy her American fantasy; and her bilingual identity, which would make her feel rewarded when she interacted with British people. Furthermore, this section explains how language learners' desirable goals in their learning process are influenced by their English learning experiences and their notions of the culture attached to a particular type of English

language.

7.8 Chinese students' different investment in English learning outside the classroom

As I have discussed above, the Chinese learners had different English learning goals, which constitute their multilayered language learner identities. In this section, I will explain how their language learning goals influence their investment in English learning outside the classroom. Driven by their various stances and English learning goals, the participants tended to employ different strategies to practise English outside the language classroom. As I discussed above, Both Xu and Jin regarded the British English speaker as a model that they strived to emulate to some degree, thus, they actively sought opportunities to communicate with British people.

F: Do you have any chance to practise your English after class?

Xu: I speak English with my host family, and speak English when I go to the restaurant or go travelling. But the chances are very limited. I have tried to talk with local people. For example, I went to the high street frequently, and talked with the people in the shop. But it's difficult sometimes. (Interview, 24/05/06)

Xu's English learning goals prompted him to attempt communication in authentic contexts: talking with host family members, communicating with waiters/waitresses in restaurants, asking for directions, or obtaining information from shop assistants.

Unlike Xu, who mainly practiced English outside the classroom on a moment to

moment basis, Jin anticipated creating a social network of English speaking friends.

F: After class, do you try to find opportunities to practise your English?

Jin: Now, all of my internet friends are British, and I keep in contact with my foreign friends that I got to know in Oxford. I also have several good friends in the public school. (Interview, 27/05/06)

Establishing and developing friendships with native speakers helped Jin to improve his English significantly, as well as learning more about British culture (see further discussion in Section 7.10.1).

Compared to the great efforts that Xu and Jin had made to communicate with British people, Lan did not actively search for opportunities to practise her English outside the language classroom, as is illustrated in the following extract.

Lan: ... If you have some foreign friends, or you like to go to the pub, you can practise your English, but I don't like to go to the pub.

F: So you basically either go to school or stay at home?

Lan: Yes. (Interview, 08/06/06)

One might argue that Lan was shy and thus reluctant to make the effort to socialise and practise her English, however in her interview, it was apparent that she did not feel the need to perfect her use of spoken English. It would seem that Lan did not think communication with British people outside the classroom was so important, possibly because she did not feel the need to be able to speak like a native speaker, yet Medgyes (1994) suggests that without a general exposure to native speaker pronunciation, it is excessively difficult for English language learners to emulate a native-like pronunciation.

In this section, I have tried to link Xu, Jin and Lan's language learners' identities with their investment in practising English outside the language classroom. Although all of them came to Britain to improve their English, they had different goals in speaking English. Lan's intelligibility goal appears to be more realistic to achieve than Xu and Jin's nativeness goal, since numerous studies have shown that most people who acquire a second language after early childhood are unlikely to achieve native-like pronunciation (Derwing and Munro, 2005). However, despite numerous criticisms of an unrealistic nativeness goal (e.g. Jenkins, 2005; Levis, 2005; Scales, et al., 2006), the data presented in this section suggests that the nativeness goal may encourage language learners to look for ways in which to meet and communicate with native speakers.

7.9 Chinese students' perceptions of English learning experience in the naturalistic context

In the previous section, I have explored how the Chinese students' language learner identities shaped their English learning practice outside the classroom. Now, I turn to look at how their language learner identities were constructed through their English learning experiences outside the classroom. Wenger (1998) suggests that identities should be seen not simply as discursively constructed categories or self-images, but as lived experiences of participation in specific communities, where categories and self-images must be worked out in practice. Accordingly, Chinese students' language learners' identities need to be studied in relation to their lived experiences of engagement in learning English. Chinese

students' English learning experiences in Britain consist of two parts: learning English in the formal classroom setting, which is a characteristic shared by ESL and EFL contexts (Block, 2003); and learning and using English in the natural English-speaking environment, which usually does not exist in an EFL context (Gass and Selinker, 2001). This section will focus on the latter part, since the participants consider that exposure to naturalistic English input makes a big difference between learning English in China and Britain. As Zhu pointed out,

The English language environment is different. If you have some problem, you can't avoid speaking English. Sometimes you force yourself to speak English. Although I often stay with Chinese, I spend more time with foreigners. Most of my colleagues in the hospital are British. (Interview, 03/06/06)

In the extract, Zhu described how his pragmatic need to obtain a desired result through the transfer of information drove him to communicate with his British colleagues in English.

Similar to Zhu, Yin also carried out communicative tasks for the purpose of providing or receiving information to satisfy her various needs.

F: Do you find any difference between learning English here and in China?

Yin: The difference is very big. The language environment in China makes it impossible for you to practise your English every day...Learning English in the UK, you can immerse your life in the society in a relaxed way; you improve your English from listening, speaking, reading and writing. You have to use English here. You may not be able to find a toilet, if you don't know English. (Interview, 14/05/06)

Yin addresses the benefits of being in an English language environment as not only improving her general communication skills, but also improving her reading and writing

skills. For Yin, immersion in English in everyday life has helped her work towards achieving some measure of communicative competence, indeed, has required her to learn to study and communicate in the target language. This point is also illustrated in the following extract.

Fan: After I came to the UK, I felt that I had to study sometimes. When I read the prospectus of different universities, I have to understand them in English, and I have to know the words. When I write an essay, I have to finish a book in English in one night. I may not be able to finish reading it even it's in Chinese. But I have to finish reading it. (Interview, 13/06/06)

In order to finish her study task successfully, Fan had to read English materials and write in English as well.

Unlike Zhu, Yin and Fan, who only emphasised the pressure of learning and using English in Britain, Xu mentioned the varieties of English he could learn, and the experience of learning English enhanced by using English in Britain.

Xu: ... Learning English in China is to meet the requirements of exams. You can learn the knowledge from books, and you can also learn the knowledge which is not included in books here. You can learn both oral and formal English here.

F: Do you find any difference in the English language learning environment?

Xu: At least, I use English every day, and I have to face English. Naturally, I force myself to learn English.

F: So you are learning English because you need to use it every day.

Xu: Yes, this helps to consolidate my English quickly and deeply. You can see the learning effect quickly. In China, the learning effect only appears in the paper, but no one knows how much the paper can show. (Interview, 24/05/06)

ESL contexts vary along the same lines as EFL contexts in terms of formal instruction in the classroom; however, unlike EFL contexts, ESL contexts offer students opportunities of

contact with English outside classroom (Block, 2003). Thus, Xu stated that he could learn both formal English and informal English in Britain, as one usually could not get the knowledge of informal English in a classroom or from text books. Furthermore, the immediate local use of English allowed Xu to confirm English linguistic forms, test hypotheses about English language structures, and develop better English language comprehension. These opportunities are not available in normal EFL contexts.

For Jin, the exposure to English language in Britain contributed to the development of certain communication skills, which were embedded in British culture.

In China, you just learn how to answer the questions on the paper from the beginning to the end, and you can't either speak English or listen to English clearly...Here is different. Firstly, you should be able to express yourself, then your speech should sound humorous, and it's very hard to achieve this. When you talk with British people, if they don't feel quite happy, that means your English is not good enough...Then, listening is very important. You learn more British culture than English language here... besides being able to speak, you should know the local culture, so that you can speak English in a natural way. (Interview, 27/05/06)

In this extract, Jin suggested that there had been little emphasis in English classrooms in China on speaking and listening skills, and this led to Chinese students' lacking communication skills in English; conversely, the English learning environment in Britain allowed language learners to achieve a high level of communicative competence, which was linked to the ability to use humorous language and the knowledge of local culture.

Overall it appears that the participants' English learning experiences in Britain are notably different from their EFL learning experiences in China in terms of naturalistic exposure to English environment. A prolonged stay in Britain demands Chinese students to

communicate in English to satisfy their physical, affective, or intellectual needs and desires. Although their actual exposure to English language is less than might be expected (see Section 5.3.1), they have the opportunities to interact in English and learn through such interaction. As to whether these Chinese students are categorised EFL or ESL learners (see Section 7.3 and 7.4), I would suggest that these Chinese students should be categorised as ‘ESL learners’, as this term readily encompasses the various English language learning experiences of these students.

7.10 The case study of Jin: Negotiating language learner’s identity through natural English learning environment and EFL classroom

I will finish the discussion of this chapter with a case study, as it provides unexpected insights emerging from Jin’s different experiences of access to English learning environments, and it also illustrates the themes raised in previous sections. Furthermore, this case study allows me to demonstrate the complexities of an individual Chinese learner’s English learning experiences across time and various social sites. The story of Jin’s experience is at once dramatic and mundane, yet similar to the stories of many other young Chinese students who undertake to learn English in Britain. Jin is the only one among the six participants who not only studied in the language school, but also took classes in a local public school. This made his English language learning experience in Britain slightly different from the other five participants. In this section, Jin’s oral narrative and the data of classroom observation provide insights into his experience of learning

English in a natural English language environment, his response to teachers' perception of him as an EFL learner in the classroom, and the passive strategies that he uses to escape from the EFL identity imposed by the institution.

7.10.1 English acquisition in natural English contexts

The host family was the first place where Jin had regular exposure to native English speakers outside the classroom. Jin lived with a big host family from October 2005 to December 2005. The host couple had three children: one 7-year old girl, one 10-year old boy with learning difficulties, and one 14-year old girl, who, according to Jin, was always shouting at her parents. Although living with five British people, the conversation between them and Jin was not as productive as Jin expected.

F: Do you talk a lot with your host family?

Jin: No, after my class, I go swimming, and then go back around 8 pm. Every day, when I come back, the 10-year old boy will ask me, 'Do you have a good day?' 'Yes' I answer. He repeats the question again and again.

...

F: Do you talk with the 14-year old girl? You two are of similar ages.

Jin: No, she doesn't like to talk to me.

F: What do the parents do?

Jin: The mother works as a cleaner from midnight 12:00 am to 8:00 am three days a week, and the father works in a railway station. They are lower class people, who don't have broad knowledge, so we have nothing to talk about. Not like the woman of the previous family I lived with, who belonged to upper class, and we could talk about many topics. (Talk with Jin, 24/10/05)

Jin chose to live in a host family instead of sharing a house with other students, because he wanted to practise speaking English with native English speakers. Although Jin was in an

English environment, in contact with British people, the particular personalities of different host family members, and Jin's sense of the difference between upper class and lower class blocked his communication with the host family.

After Christmas, Jin decided to change his host family, because he was tired of the messy situation of the host family — 'they are swearing all the time. The husband beats the wife, the wife beats the children, the children beat the dog, the dog bites the husband's and my clothes' (Observation: field notes, 19/01/06). Jin realised this English environment did not provide him enough opportunities to practise his English, and Jin's own social class identity made him unable to accept the kind of English he heard in the host family.

The second host family was much simpler compared to the previous one. Jin shared the house with Ivan, his Russian classmate, and an old English host lady, Margaret. Margaret worked for unemployed people, so there were always people coming to complain about their lives. Another group of visitors were teenagers who came to buy cigarettes, since Margaret sold cigarettes for her father in the house. As Jin described, 'I'm involved in meeting either unemployed adults or problematic teenagers' (Talk with Jin, 17/04/06). Generally, Margaret talked to Jin during breakfast and dinner for no more than half an hour per day.

F: Which topics do you usually talk about?

Jin: We don't have many common topics to talk about, since she is so old. When we meet, we always try to find something to talk about. Generally, we talk about my study and some universities. (Talk with Jin, 17/04/06)

Jin gained access to a group of English people in the second host family. However,

different ages and different life experiences resulted in limited meaningful conversations. In order to avoid the embarrassment of silence at breakfast time, Jin shifted his interest to watching TV soaps.

Compared to the context of the host family, the local school where Jin studied A-level biology courses in the afternoon, tended to be a fruitful setting in which Jin acquired English in a natural way. Jin was surrounded by British students, and as he pointed out ‘the environment in the public school is very different from Crawley Language School, in which most people surrounding me are foreigners’ (Call to Jin, 16/04/06). The teachers in the public school also gave Jin a quite different experience from Crawley Language School. ‘The teachers in Crawley are selected, and they speak English in a very slow and clear way, they are always aware whether you can understand or not, but the teachers in the local school speak English with various accents’ (Call to Jin, 16/04/06). Jin appreciated his learning experiences in the public school, which offered him opportunities to practise his English, and communicate with native English speakers in a meaningful way, although different life styles prevented him becoming good friends with the British students he encountered.

When I attended classes in the public school in the first week, I couldn’t understand my classmates, as they spoke very quickly. I couldn’t participate in their discussions in the class, and I couldn’t join them after class. They told some jokes, and I couldn’t understand. Even when I understood, I didn’t know why they were laughing. In the second week, I made some friends. But we had different life styles. After class, they went to play billiards. But I didn’t like it, I just wanted to go back and sleep after the whole day of classes. I think study in the local school for one month is as worthy as study in the language school for one year. (Call to Jin, 16/04/06)

Outside the school, Jin went to the supermarket, gym, shop, and cinema. In all these social settings, Jin had to speak English to the staff in order to achieve his purpose. For example, when Jin had problems with getting a credit card, he had to solve the problem by himself.

I applied for seven credit cards one month ago, but got none until now. Fan got her credit card through HSBC, then I went to HSBC. They asked me to fill in an application form. I felt quite strange, and asked them whether it would be ok or not, since I didn't have an account in HSBC. And they told me that it was fine. I waited for a month, and called them to ask why I hadn't got my credit card. They told me it was rejected two weeks ago. (Talk with Jin, 23/11/05)

English is the only accepted language during these social settings, in which Jin was treated as a regular customer and a valid English speaker, rather than an English language learner.

Jin's learning and living experience in Britain has provided him a chance to communicate with native English speakers within the local community, for example, in the host family, in the public school, or in the bank. Although naturalistic exposure to English does not always lead to plentiful meaningful conversations with native speakers, such as the case of Jin's two host families, Jin is learning how to make his way through various interaction necessary to daily life, such as the case of HSBC bank. This English learning experience is quite different from his English learning experience in China, a truly EFL context, which lacks local speakers and opportunities for using English (Mitchell and Myles, 1998, p. 1). Jin's varied exposure to English can be deemed to be a main characteristic of ESL learning (Block, 2003), however, his English learning experience in naturalistic context seems not to be taken into account when the language school and language teachers identify him as an EFL learner.

7.10.2 EFL learning experience in the language school

In Crawley Language School, Jin was labelled as a ‘Chinese student’, an international student, whose first language is not English. Therefore, he had to take the IELTS test to show sufficient English language proficiency to get admission to a British university.

According to the official website of the IELTS (2006),

IELTS, the International English Language Testing System, covers all four language skills: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking and is offered in two test formats - Academic and General Training. All candidates take the same Listening and Speaking Modules and there is an option of either Academic or General Training Reading and Writing Modules.

Academic is suitable for candidates planning to undertake higher education study or who are seeking professional registration. General Training is suitable for candidates planning to undertake non-academic training or work experience, or for immigration purposes.

Following this guideline, many language teachers feel comfortable and confident in putting the students in the ‘EFL learners’ category, as one of them wrote to me in an email,

Do we treat learners as EFL or ESL learners? Well, I would say EFL learners. Because most, if not all, of the published materials we use, for General English or IELTS courses, are designed for EFL learners. In fact, I would suggest that teachers in language schools do it without thinking; I don't think much thought is given to the EFL/ESL debate in this teaching environment. (Email interview, 25/01/06)

For this language teacher, most of the published materials he used for teaching, typically for IELTS teaching, were designed for EFL learners. Accordingly, he regarded his students

as EFL learners. The following extract exemplifies how Jin was treated as an EFL learner in the IELTS course. In the class of 23/01/06, Sally was explaining the grammar difference between 'less' and 'fewer' to the students,

Sally: 'Less' is connected with...?

Students: Uncountable noun.

Sally: Yes. 'Fewer' is connected with...?

Students: Countable noun.

Sally: Yes. Do you find, 'fewer' has not been used anymore?

Jin: Yeah, in the supermarket, you see, 'less than five items'.

Sally: The politicians say, 'less taxes' rather than 'fewer taxes'. I think 'fewer' will not be used before long. But as a foreign learner, you have to follow the rule of the IELTS test. (Observation: field notes, 23/01/06)

When the authentic use of English language is not consistent with the standard usage exemplified in the IELTS test, Jin has to follow the latter, because he is a 'foreign learner' and a 'IELTS candidate'. The teacher was trying to explain the tension between being an EFL learner needing to pass a statutory 'gate keeping' test and the everyday use of spoken English. However, for the learner this is problematic: on the one hand, they need to learn formal English for the test, but on the other hand, they need to learn colloquial English to participate in daily language interaction outside the classroom, where the use of formal English would continue to make them sound as outsiders to British community.

7.10.3 To be or not to be

I have discussed thus far Jin's ESL learning experiences outside the classroom and EFL learning experiences in the classroom. The gap between acquiring English in a natural

context and practising English for the IELTS test in a formal classroom made Jin feel uncomfortable, as he put it rather sarcastically,

In the IELTS test, you have to show the examiner that you know how to use these conjunction words. So you have to use these words frequently in the writing part. If you write a natural connected paragraph without using this symbolic conjunction words, you will only get 5.0. But if you use these words, you will get 6.0. When you can get 7.0 in your writing part, you would have no idea about what you have written. (Interview, 27/05/06)

As an international student, he has to take the IELTS test, and he has to take the IELTS preparation course to cope with the test. The IELTS test does not consider the difference between the international candidates who learn English in their own countries and those who have learnt English in an English speaking country for an extended period of time. Guided by the IELTS, the language school has no alternative, but to put the international students like Jin in such classes. The English course is not fully designed to meet the international students' interests and needs, but to prepare them to go to a British university. Being in a powerless position, Jin was unable to challenge the IELTS, and the institution and language school who work with the IELTS in an active way. Instead, Jin chose not to attend the IELTS course after he gained 6.5 in the IELTS test, even though he had paid the full tuition fee.

7.10.4 Comment

Jin's story helps to elucidate the negative impact of the inadequate institutional labelling of his language learner identity caused by the IELTS. There is a contrast between the institution's construction of students' language learner identities based on nationality and the students' own investment in their own language learner identities through their English language learning experiences outside of the language classroom. Jin may view himself as a valid English speaker, while the conceptualisation of him as an EFL learner and the associated language pedagogies limit his opportunities of acquiring and using the various forms of English, and furthermore, prevents him from becoming a legitimate speaker of English.

Norton (1997) suggests that the category of language learners has to be kept open and co-constructed with language learners. Otherwise, the absolute bureaucratic institution labelling might cause a fracture between learning English in the classroom and outside of the classroom in a native English speaking context, negative feelings towards schooling, and non-productive language learning and teaching. Therefore, it would seem that an English language classroom atmosphere of mutual respect to engage students with their own linguistic options, choices and behaviour is called for. However, considering the strong impact of the IELTS, I understand that this proposal cannot be achieved without changing the current IELTS test situation. Then, here raises a more fundamental issue: there is a crucial need for a new contextually sensitive English test system, which can take international students English learning experiences in Britain, and their needs to participate in British society into account, so that both language learners and language teachers in Britain can be liberated from the constrains of the IELTS.

7.11 Summary

I began this chapter with the language teachers' promotion and limitation of the Chinese learners' participation in British society in terms of their contradictory perceptions of the Chinese students' language learner identities, and the language teachers' categorisation of the Chinese students. I then focused on the Chinese students' stance: their English accent goals, their intention to participate in British society, and their wishes to be considered as valid and legitimate English speakers. At the same time, I presented two counter examples to address the complexity and diversity of both the language teacher's stance and the Chinese student's stance. Subsequently, I looked at the participants' different investment in English learning in relation to their language learners' identities, and their perceptions of their different English learning experiences in Britain. Finally, I used a case study to suggest that Jin's experiences of learning English in the naturalistic context is in contrast to the language teacher and language school's label for him as an EFL learner, and therefore, the category of language learners should be co-constructed with learners, and the current IELTS situation calls for a change.

I conclude with three reflective comments about the relationship between language learner identity and SLL. First, the participants have multilayered language learners' identities, which are far more complicated than the categories of English language learners. Yin, Xu and Jin's desired a British accent, and wished to socialise with British people, while Fan preferred American English, and identified herself as a bilingual speaker of

Chinese and English. Unlike the other four participants, Lan regarded intelligibility as her English speaking goal. It is important to note that categorising students is inevitable and can be useful for teachers to deal with the complex world of education; however, students' individual differences must be respected and accommodated sufficiently (Roux, 2001), since the Chinese students various language learner identities have shaped their agency and investment in English learning and use.

Second, the participants' reconstruction of their language learners' identities in relation to their English learning orientation and English learning experiences in Britain has been constantly challenged by language teachers' placing them into an EFL category and perceiving them as the foreign Other. In light of the model of community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), this study understands second language socialisation as a process by which newcomers, the Chinese learners, become increasingly competent in knowing English language as they participate peripherally and legitimately in practices. Lave and Wenger (1991) point out,

To become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources and opportunities for participation.

(p. 100-101)

Based on the data presented in this chapter, I argue that on the one hand, old-timers, the language teachers help newcomers, the Chinese learners participating in British society by offering them the knowledge of British English language and British cultural practices; on the other hand, influenced by the IELTS, the language teachers address Chinese students as

the foreign Other constantly. As a possible result, the Chinese learners are kept as outsiders of the larger English speaking community, and their movements towards full participation in the English speaking community are constrained.

Finally, from a practice point of view, English language professionals would benefit from knowing the variety of their students' language learner identities. If language teachers were aware of their students' different stances, English learning goals, and English learning experiences, they would better understand their students' linguistic needs, as well as their needs of varying degrees of ownership of English. Language teachers' perceptions of their students as legitimate English speakers would help the students to participate more fully in both the academic discourse of the British university and British society.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

March 10, 2006

Half a year has passed

I have been in this gloomy country for half a year now. From strange to familiar, from fearful to brave, from lonely to distant...All these transformations leave their imprints on my life journey deeply...

I once said that I would never leave Guangzhou for a long time in my life, while I am now in the UK, which has an eight-hour time difference from China, and I am going to stay here for two years. I once thought I was disobedient in my bones, while I find my spirit actually misses my family. Studying in the UK makes me see truly myself more clearly. (Yin's diary, 10/03/06)

For Yin, as for other participants, the ultimate reward of an English language learning journey in the UK is perhaps not so much better English language competence, or deeper understanding of British culture, but a greater sense of the self. In fact, Yin's English language skills have improved and she has acculturated in ways that allow her to understand British people and British society like never before. Through the process of adaptation, she negotiates her identities, and achieves new knowledge of her own image of self. It seems that the English language learning journey in Britain for many Chinese students is also a journey of discovering who they are and how they change.

In this concluding chapter, I will firstly summarise answers to my three research questions, and then identify some ways in which this present study has contributed to the study of identity and second language learning (SLL). I will next extrapolate from my findings to look at their possible implications for second language teaching practice. I will then look at implications for further research in the area of identity and SLL research.

Finally, I will present my reflections on the research process of this present study.

8.1 Answers to the research questions

To answer my first question about in what ways Chinese learners' identities influence their engagement with English learning in Britain, I conclude that, according to this present study, four main aspects of identities influence the participants' English learning practices in Britain: gender identity, national identity, social class identity and language learner identity. The discussion in the previous four chapters demonstrates that these four aspects of identity have an impact on these Chinese learners' participation in English learning practices in the language classroom, and their motivation and investment in English learning and use outside the classroom. Their access to English linguistic resources and international opportunities available in various social contexts is mediated by their identities. Their attitudes towards and interaction with their language teachers, their classmates, their friends, their host family members and other interlocutors are also constructed by their identities.

To answer my second question about to what extent Chinese learners' identities are negotiated and changed through their English language learning journeys in Britain, the findings suggest that the transformation of the participants' identities occurs with multiple facets and in multiple dimensions. All these Chinese learners have experienced some behaviour, attitude or value changes in relation to gender, national, social class and language learner identities. In general, more changes have occurred in their behaviour and

attitudes than in their fundamental values. They have changed some behaviour and attitudes for survival and having an opportunity to integrate into British academic discourse and British society. They appear to be more reluctant to change their values, since they still feel attached to Chinese cultural value system, which is deeply embedded in their minds.

To answer my final question about the impact of the transformation of Chinese learners' identities on their continuing English learning in Britain, the findings show that the reconstruction of Chinese learners' identities has a positive impact on their continuing English learning in Britain, since the transformation itself is a result of Chinese learners' adaptation to British culture. When the participants perceive new behaviour, attitudes or values in British culture, they find some of them are different from or even conflict with those in Chinese culture. Then, they tend to rethink and reassess their presuppositions formed in China. This is likely to lead to negotiation and reconstruction of their identities. My findings suggest that after the process of re-evaluating and repositioning the self, these Chinese learners would seem to have positioned themselves between British culture and Chinese culture, and possibly have developed multiple lenses to view and make sense of the world. In this way, they have expanded their opportunities of interaction with people from various cultural and national backgrounds in English.

8.2 Contributions of the findings of this study

This present study seems to suggest that the transformation of Chinese learners' gender,

national, social class and language learner identities is tied closely to their English learning and living experiences in Britain. In particular, the findings of Chapter Four offer three critical insights into the issue of gender identity and SLL. In the first instance, gender identity, incorporating among other social factors, shapes Chinese learners' various access to and attitudes towards English linguistic resources, and their different motivation and investment in English language learning and use (see Section 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4). There are apparently no common characteristics of English learning practice, which can be universally ascribed to either a male Chinese student group or a female Chinese student group. Chinese learners' gendered practices are highly context-sensitive and individually varied (see Section 4.5). This is a reminder of the importance of not viewing or treating either male students or female students as a homogeneous group. Then, through their interaction with English language teachers in the classroom, and their discursive interaction with British people in various social contexts, the Chinese learners tended to develop an intercultural performance of gender, rather than completely assimilating to the gender practices in the British culture, or totally stuck to the gender practices in the Chinese culture (see Section 4.6). Finally, the findings challenge a commonly held stereotype that Asians in general, and Asian women in particular, tend to be quiet, passive, timid or indirect. Instead, the female Chinese learners participating in this present study appear to be active, confident, self-determined, and even capable of challenging language teachers' views directly in the classroom.

The findings of Chapter Five point to a strong link between national identity and SLL in the study abroad context, which is generally under-studied. During their English

language learning journeys in Britain, the Chinese learners tend to affirm and often display their membership of China and Chinese national imagination, which contribute to a heightened sense of Chinese national identity and increased patriotism (see Section 5.1 and 5.2). At the same time, the experience of study abroad and observing another culture appears to provide an alternative set of cultural values and ways of interpreting the world, and would seem to have encouraged the Chinese learners to question and re-examine their own attitudes and values related to their national identities. Then, the elements which make up an individual's Chinese national identity are brought under scrutiny, and their national identities can be shifted away from exclusionary discourses and practices to ones that are more open and inclusive (see Section 5.3.2 and 5.4.2). Furthermore, the Chinese learners' national identities and cultural practices influence their discursive socialisation with native English speakers, overseas students of other nationalities, and other Chinese speakers (see Section 5.3.1, 5.4.1 and 5.5.2). My findings suggest that the Chinese learners tend to seek membership of the three communities simultaneously to fulfil their different needs. In this multiple socialisation process, their first language socialisation appears to be in conflict with their second language socialisation (see Section 5.5.1). These findings invite the reader to take a more complex consideration of second language socialisation, one which recognises that Chinese learners actually socialise into three linguistically and culturally heterogeneous communities — the British community, overseas student community and Chinese community, involving bilingualism and the acquisition of a second language.

The findings of Chapter Six point to the significance of investigating the relationship between social class identity and SLL, which has seldom been discussed in previous

research (Collins, 2006). Moreover, the SLL experiences of privileged students have not been documented as much as less privileged students, perhaps because researchers see the situations and needs of the affluent and secure are less serious compared to the poor and troubled. I have shown that the privileged Chinese learners' social class identities are expressed in their parental desires, in their perceptions of themselves and part-time work, in their interaction with their peers, their host families and other encounters in Britain, as well as in their organisation of friendship (see Section 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4). I have also shown how the Chinese learners' social class identities are negotiated through their everyday experiences in the classroom and outside the classroom (see Section 6.5 and 6.6). These findings are valuable in that: firstly, they allow the reader to understand the situations and needs of the privileged students studying abroad; secondly, they are an advance on studies which treat social class as a social variable of determining the use and learning of a second language; thirdly, they raise a fundamental question of second language teaching — whether the language teacher should put more energy into educating for responsibility besides educating for success.

The findings of Chapter Seven suggest that the co-construction of language learner identity is not always a peaceful, collaborative process, but is often a struggle involving power relationships. On the one hand, the findings have shown that the Chinese learners have developed their own senses of language learner identity through their experiences of learning and using English (see Section 7.6, 7.7 and 7.9). On the other hand, the findings point to the limitation of the Chinese learners' agency. It appears that they cannot shake off the role of 'foreign Other' or 'EFL learner' imposed by the language teacher and the

language school caused by the impact of the IELTS, the external ‘gate keeping’ English language examination (see Section 7.3 and 7.10). These ascribed identities tend to restrict the Chinese learners active participation in both the academic discourse of the British university and British society (see Section 7.5). However, some language teachers recognise the Chinese learners as legitimate English speakers, and assist them engaging with English speaking community (see Section 7.4). This demonstrates the powerful role that experts can play in learners’ second language socialisation. It also offers an important theoretical implication: in the process of legitimate peripheral participation, we cannot assume that experts and old-timers (language teachers) will always assist newcomers (second language learners) moving towards full participation in a community of practice (the target language community); sometimes, they may limit the centripetal movement of newcomers.

8.3 Pedagogical implications

This study has implications for pedagogy on both conceptual and practical levels regarding our understanding of second language learners with multiple identities and various needs, and how to foster their second language socialisation and their participation in the target society.

8.3.1 Conceptual implications

In reviewing the theoretical framework laid out in Chapter Two, the question arises as to what end these ideas may be applied and of what value this research is in the field of identity and SLL. This thesis serves several purposes. First of all, it is important to explore the relationship between identity and SLL in a study abroad context, in which this relationship has not been sufficiently investigated. In support of this advance, particularly the advance of exploring the relationships between national identity, social class identity and SLL in a study abroad context, this thesis incorporates study abroad, social psychology and social science literature, along with SLL literature. Some of the literature of social psychology (e.g. Maslow's hierarchy of needs) and social science (e.g. class analysis) has rarely been considered in the area of identity and SLL, and it would be useful for scholars to look further into these bodies of literature.

Subsequently, this thesis invites the reader to reconsider the evaluation of the SLL abroad journey. Wenger (1998, p. 8) maintains that learning is 'not a separate activity... [but] is something we can assume — whether we see it or not... Even failing to learn what is expected in a given situation usually involves learning something else instead'. Accordingly, this thesis suggests that the achievement of language learners' SLL abroad journeys should not only be judged according to their second language learning outcome; instead, language learners' developed senses of being competent target language speakers and their developed senses of their multiple identities should also be taken into account. This approach can help educators avoid consigning poor attainment in SLL merely to an individual's failure to learn (Toohey, 1999). It also encourages educators to see second language learners as people, rather than to view them as SLL subjects; to see SLL as social

practice, which is situated within the social world, rather than to view it as a mechanical input-interaction-output process, which is context free.

In addition, integrating the concept of multiple identities to the SLL area can empower second language learners in the language classroom. According to Bourdieu (1991, p. 45), language teachers are ‘empowered universally to subject the linguistic performance of speaking subjects’. Instead of treating students simply as deficient second language learners in the language classroom, I argue that language teachers should regard second language learners as valuable and intellectual participants in the language classroom, respect them as competent in various ways, and place a positive value on these competences. For example, an English language learner such as Jin was a fluent bilingual speaker of Mandarin and Korean; Yin was a talented artist; Zhu had a broad knowledge of both Chinese and Western economic systems and political systems. In my view, the knowledge and social and cultural competences of these students cannot be diminished in the language classroom in terms of their less competitive abilities in English language. The affirmation of second language learners’ multiple identities could reframe them as competent and productive participants in the classroom.

Finally, the acknowledgement of second language learners’ multiple identities can contribute to the establishment of an interactive learning atmosphere in the language classroom. As Talburt and Stewart (1999, p. 173) suggest ‘rather than understanding students abroad as discovering a pre-existent culture “out there”, we must understand their actions as dynamically creating culture, thus necessarily making cultural learning interactive’. Accordingly, during their learning experiences in the language classroom,

second language learners do not simply acquire linguistic and cultural knowledge and communication skills from language teachers, they also provide valuable intellectual and cultural resources, and make their unique contributions to the language classroom; language teachers may no longer be the only providers of knowledge, wisdom and expertise in the language classroom, and they can also learn multicultural knowledge and multiple viewpoints from second language learners.

8.3.2 Practical implications

On a more practical level, this present study offers a number of suggestions for pedagogical intervention. I will discuss what might be done, as suggested by both related literature and what is derived from my findings. First, language teachers need to understand second language learners as extremely complex social beings with multiple identities, and then incorporate this acknowledgement into their course design and teaching practice in the classroom. For example, the participants in the present study are young male/female secondary school/undergraduate students from middle-class/upper-middle-class/upper-class families in Mainland China. As Norton (2000) points out, identities are already part of second language learners, whether this is formally recognised by language teachers or not. She then proposes that the language teacher needs to understand how the identities of learners are engaged in the formal language classroom. Understanding each individual second language learner's multiple identities can assist language teachers to understand second language learners' utterances and behaviour, to manage classroom

conflict in a constructive, mutually beneficial way, and to create a multi-respected and multi-voiced learning atmosphere in the language classroom (for instance, see the discussion in Section 4.5.2 and 5.6). Informed by my own research experiences, I suggest that it might be helpful for language teachers to arrange informal conversations with each second language learner in the beginning of the language programme to discover learners' experiences, life histories, desires and needs, so that they can gain some understanding of their students' identities.

Second, since 'knowledge within a community of practice and ways of perceiving and manipulating objects characteristic of community practices are encoded in artifacts in ways that can be more or less revealing' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 102), language teachers need to use strategies to enhance the transparency of knowledge. Strategies may include explaining the values and beliefs behind British norms of communication and behaviour in social situations to facilitate second language learners' participation in British society, rather than simply introducing these norms (see the discussion in Section 7.1.2). Language teachers could also advise second language learners to read about British norms of conversation and behaviour (e.g. Kate Fox's 'Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour'), and encourage them to find out what British do and why British do this by themselves. Second language learners would probably learn the knowledge of English language and British culture more effectively if they had some understanding of the reasons why British people speak and behave in certain ways.

Third, second language learners would gain more confidence in using English if language teachers could project them as legitimate users of English language in the

classroom (see the discussion in Section 7.5). As Holliday (2005, p. 13) argues, 'because English is international, its ownership is shifted to whoever wishes to use it'. Similarly, Norton (1997) suggests that second language learners who view themselves as legitimate speakers of English can own English. In practice, language teachers could foster second language learners' senses of being legitimate English speakers by introducing varieties of English to students, presenting British English as a type of English among other types of English, and validating the English that second language learners speak (e.g. Chinese English) as legitimate varieties of English. Furthermore, it may also be helpful to inform second language learners about both the 'native principle' and the 'intelligibility principle' in pronunciation (Levis, 2005). Second language learners need to know that achieving a native-like English accent is almost an unrealistic goal, and a native-like English accent might not be necessary for becoming a successful English speaker. All these strategies could possibly help second language learners feel comfortable with their own English accents, and thus they may feel less reluctant to speak English.

Fourth, since most participants found it difficult to integrate with the native English speaker community (see Section 5.3.1), language schools and language teachers may need to find more ways of promoting interaction between second language learners and the local British community. Bourdieu (1993) suggests that the essence of communication lies more in the social conditions of possibility of communication than in the communication itself. In this sense, possible strategies should focus on how to create new conditions or use existing conditions to develop communicative interaction between second language learners and British people. For example, second language learners could be informed

about opportunities for joining local special interest groups, and encouraged to take part in them according to their own interests. In this way, second language learners could meet local British people who share similar interests with them, having meaningful conversations, learning about each other and making friends. Moreover, it is necessary to keep in mind that no single strategy can be universally applied to all second language learners in terms of the complexity of their identities, personalities and situations. Language teachers can also design various tasks to encourage second language learners to communicate with their surrounding British people. Students like Jin and Xu, who have a little communication with their host family members, can be asked to find out one of their host family members' hobbies; students like Jun, who has a part-time job, can be asked to find out one of their part-time work colleagues' favourite films; students like Lan, who does not involve in any reliable context of meeting British people regularly outside the classroom, can be suggested to visit a local church at weekends, and find out the characteristics of the service practised in the church.

Finally, it seems that some language teachers might need to rethink their attitudes towards second language learners communicating with their compatriot students in their first language outside the classroom. Beardsmore (1993) argues that it is unnatural to expect large homogeneous groups of speakers to interact spontaneously in a second language outside the formal classroom. This present study also demonstrates that in language schools which have a substantial number of Chinese students, Chinese students' use of English outside the classroom is subverted by the great weight of numbers (see Section 5.5.1). Furthermore, language teachers need to be realistic in acknowledging that

socialising with other co-nationals plays an important role in providing second language learners with crucial psychological and affective support. Since it is at times difficult for people to form close friendships with those who have very different cultural values or lifestyles from their own, second language learners may need monocultural friendship networks for their healthy social integration (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006). Understood in this sense, second language learners' socialising with their co-nationals in their first language should not be regarded as a problem and a barrier to their SLL. Rather, their first language socialisation should be considered as an important social interaction in addition to their second language socialisation, since second language learners may have side-by-side needs and desires for both first and second languages.

8.4 Implications for further research in the area of identity and SLL

This present study points in the direction of several other future related identity and SLL studies. I will look at such studies in three groups. First, I will look at additional research procedures I could have used in the investigation of my topic, procedures which could and perhaps should have been implemented at this time. Second, I will look at future studies using the data that I have excluded. Third, I will look at other possible studies, which usefully add to this field in other directions.

8.4.1 Additional procedures that could have been used

Since this present study places the Chinese learners' own accounts in central position, less attention has been given to the language teachers' voices. Considering the great role that the language teachers played in the Chinese learners' English learning journeys in Britain, the findings of this present study would be enhanced by an investigation of the language teachers' perceptions. This could be done by conducting interviews with the language teachers to explore how they perceived the Chinese learners' gender, national and social class identities, whether they related these perceptions to their English language teaching or not, and how they related these perceptions to their teaching practice. With this additional data, it would be enlightening to know to what extent the language teachers acknowledged the Chinese learners' multiple identities, and whether the language teachers' certain utterances and behaviour in the language classroom were accidental or were associated with what they believed in. Further studies may well benefit from more critical analysis, which would have included both the strong voices of the Chinese learners and some understanding of the language teachers' positions.

8.4.2 Studies with the data I excluded

As I mentioned in Section 3.10, the data of the narrative interviews with another nine Chinese learners besides the six primary participants were excluded, because they lacked substance in comparison with the data from the six main participants. The data of the nine Chinese learners were different from the data of the six primary participants in several respects:

- a) the nine Chinese learners were aged between 20 and 37;
- b) they had finished or nearly finished their English language programmes in the language schools when I interviewed them;
- c) they had studied English in Britain for a long period of time, which was varied from six months to eighteen months;
- d) two of them were going to study a bachelor's degree in business, two Chinese learners were going to study a master's degree in business, four of them were going to study a master's degree in art, and one Chinese learner was going to study a master's degree in psychology;
- e) besides the narrative interviews, little other data of the nine Chinese learners had been collected.

In terms of research processes, it would have been interesting to see what could be established by only using narrative interview data. Considering the big difference in age among the nine Chinese learners, it would have been interesting to see in what ways Chinese learners' age influenced their engagement with English language learning in Britain. With regard to the variety of disciplines the nine Chinese studied, it would have also been interesting to see whether the Chinese learners majored in different subjects had different English learning experiences in Britain or not. If the Chinese learners' academic backgrounds had encompassed their English learning experiences, then the following question could be: how did Chinese learners with different academic backgrounds learn

English differently in Britain in terms of process and outcome.

8.4.3 Studies with new data

This present study appears to provide several implications for further research on identity and SLL. The first implication is that research on identities and SLL should consider the interrelationship among different aspects of identity, such as gender identity, national identity and social class identity. It is apparently important to reiterate that different aspects of identity often influence SLL in an overlapping and complex way, and it is difficult to determine the extent to which aspect of identity alone impacts on SLL processes and outcome. For example, Jin's limited interaction with his host family members (see Section 7.10.1) illustrates this notion: it was related to several issues including social class, personality, age and life experience. Thus, future research attention should be paid to the interconnectedness of different aspects of identity.

Then, research on identity and SLL needs to seriously consider the various social contexts in which research participants are involved. A decontextualised research account would not reveal the complexity, the variability and the situated nature of SLL and identity construction. As this present study shows, the six primary participants — a seemingly homogeneous group in terms of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds — have different agency and investment in English language learning and use, and they access different linguistic resources and interactional opportunities available in English language. In some cases, the participants display their identities differently in the language classroom and

outside the language classroom. For example, Jin and Zhu showed positive attitudes towards homosexuality in classroom discussions, while both of them refused to accept the practice of homosexuality in real life (see Section 4.5.3 and 4.6.2). This suggests that the participants' utterances and behaviour should be analysed as these are embedded in the context of community practices in which they participate. In addition, examining the same participant's practice in multiple contexts may be valuable.

Subsequently, the interesting findings of this present study calls for replication — in particular with Chinese learners studying in other English-speaking countries. Correspondingly, of interest would be studies with students of other nationalities, who study a second language abroad for a long period of time. For such replicated studies I would like to see contextualised interpretations of second language learners' voices and actions by triangulating multiple research methods, data sources and viewpoints through longitudinal investigations. Another possibility is to expand this present study by exploring the six primary participants' English learning experiences and identity transformations when they finish their academic studies in British universities.

Returning to data collection, this present study shows a trend in diary studies: traditional handwriting diaries seem to be replaced by internet blogs in future with regard to the great impact of internet on people's daily lives. Enabled by information and communications technology, internet blogs provide the researcher not only text data, but also visual data and audio data. For example, Yin's blog consisted of her writing, her photos, her favourite pictures and music. Yin used all these tools to describe her experiences and feelings of studying and living in Britain, as is illustrated in the following

diary entry:

March 19, 2006

My 'masterpiece'

Do I come to Britain to learn English or to learn cooking?



In this diary entry, both the text and the photos offer their own insights into Yin's lives in Britain. Unfortunately, the visual data and audio data collected from Yin's MSN blog had not been analysed due to the lack of well-established data analysis methods to handle with this data in the qualitative research area. It will be lost to the researcher if only the text data of participants' 'multimedia diaries' is used, so an appropriate data analysis method which can analyse and interpret different types of data comprehensively is called for. This typical research experience made me start to think about the impact of information and communications technology on research methods. Maybe in the near future, 'diary studies' will be replaced by 'blog studies', 'space studies' or 'Facebook studies'.

8.5 My evaluation of and reflection on research processes

In this section, I will briefly review of some of the most salient procedures retrospectively in my research study. I will offer my own comments on aspects of the methodological

approach to the study and my role as researcher. I will also reveal some back-stories behind my research process to exemplify the messiness I have experienced in my research process, which includes the moments of confusion, disillusion, uncertainty, doubt and dilemma. I will look in turn at research questions, pilot study, classroom observation, data analysis and the roles of the researcher.

8.5.1 Revising research questions

I started my PhD research with my own interest in the relationship between gender and SLL. After reviewing an amount of literature on gender and SLL, I decided to investigate the transformation of Chinese learners' gender identities. I carefully selected Chinese learners studying in language schools in Britain as my focused group for three reasons: (1) fewer research studies have been conducted to investigate Chinese learners studying in language schools than in universities in Britain; (2) seven closely located language schools would possibly allow me to access some Chinese learners studying there; (3) my own experiences of being a Chinese learner, who learns and uses English in Britain, would help me to understand other Chinese learners' English learning experiences in Britain. Based on these considerations, I developed my first version of research questions in April 2005 as followings:

- a) To what extent do Chinese learners' gender identities determine their engagement with classroom interaction in a linguistically and culturally mixed ESL classroom

in England?

- b) Are Chinese learners' gender identities negotiated and changed through classroom interaction in this context? And if so, how?
- c) And if there are changes in Chinese learners' gender identities in this context, what are the learners' perceptions of these changes, and their influences on the learners' performances in the classroom?

With the above research questions, I started my two-month pilot study in Crawley Language School. After conducting intensive classroom observation and having a lot of conversations with the four participants, I realised that first, gender identity could not be understood apart from other aspects of identity, such as national identity and social class identity; second, Chinese learners' English learning experiences in the language classroom could not be understood apart from their English learning experiences outside the language classroom. Thus, I revised my original research questions to the version that I presented in Section 1.6. It was the second version of the research questions that I used through my data collection and data analysis process. These research questions were productive in that they revealed a great deal about the co-constructed relationship between identity and English language learning both inside and outside the language classroom.

During the writing up process, I found out that my research questions could be improved by making several changes in light of the emergent findings from data analysis. Firstly, 'ESL learning' should be replaced by 'English language learning', because it became evident that the Chinese learners were involved in a naturalistic ESL learning

context, but they were often regarded as EFL learners by language teachers, and they were treated as EFL learners in terms of the requirements of the IELTS. Secondly, 'sojourns' should be replaced by 'journeys', as I learnt that the word 'sojourns' was not used as commonly as 'journeys'. Thirdly, the research questions, 'Are Chinese learners' identities negotiated and changed through their ESL learning sojourns in Britain? And if so, how?' could be changed into 'To what extent are Chinese learners' identities negotiated and changed through their English language learning journeys in Britain?'. Acknowledging the transformation of second language learners' identities has been well discussed in various research contexts in the last decade (see, for instance, Norton, 2000; Miller, 2003; Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004a), this question apparently needs to be rephrased.

8.5.2 Learning from pilot study

Although all the data collected by pilot study is excluded from this thesis, the pilot study plays an important and essential role in the research process. The pilot study not only pointed the directions for further study (see Section 3.8), but also helped me build up my confidence in conducting this research study. Nowadays, when I read the research diaries I wrote in the beginning of the pilot study, it reminds me how uncertain I was at that time.

I am now still in the status that I am not sure what I can get from the classroom, and what kind of data I am looking for. So, when Karina (a female English teacher in Crawley Language School) asked me, 'Have you got something you want from this class?' I could only answer, 'Yeah, there are some events drawing my attention, but I still feel uncertain about whether these issues are related to my research questions or not, and how to relate these issues with my research topic.' (Research diary, 06/05/05)

Starting as a novice researcher, I then learnt how to behave as a researcher in the language classroom, how to approach research participants, how to communicate with research participants, and how to get the information related to my research questions during the two-month pilot study. All these skills were then applied to the main study.

8.5.3 Unavoidable participation in classroom observation

Before I started carrying out classroom observation, I had thought that ideally, I would like to sit at the back of the classroom, so that the class would be disrupted as little as possible. However, the U-shaped arrangement of desks and the limited space of most language classrooms made it unrealistic for me to sit at the back of the classroom. I had to sit at the end of the desks next to other students. Although I physically appeared to be a member of the student group, I tried not to participate in classroom activities, so that the data would not be distorted. The long-time classroom observation suggests that my presence in the classroom did not influence the regular routine in the language classroom significantly, as Carl, a male English teacher talked to me after a class, 'I haven't changed any part of my class, since you were here' (Talk with Carl, 02/05/05). But I found that my participation in the language classroom practice was difficult to be avoided in the following three circumstances: firstly, the students asked for my help. For example, in the class of 18/11/05, Noriko, a male Japanese student, was doing pair work with Yin, and they were reading a handout together,

Noriko: What does this mean? ‘a strange country’? (looking at me)

F: It means when you newly arrive in a country, you feel unfamiliar with the country.

Yin: In Chinese.

F: 一个陌生的国家.

A strange country. (Observation: field notes, 18/11/05)

Secondly, the language teachers asked for my help. For example, in the class of 14/12/05, Sandra, a female English teacher, was trying to teach Zhu to write a conclusion.

Sandra: You can write ‘the government can introduce a positive incentive law for married couples’.

Jun: What is the meaning of ‘incentive’?

Sandra: You know donkey?

Jun: No.

Sandra: A donkey looks like a horse. It is very stupid. If you put a carrot before it, it will continue walking.

Jun: ... (still looks confused)

Sandra: Oh, F, can you tell him what is a ‘donkey’ in Chinese?

F: 驴子.

Donkey.

Jun: Oh, I see. (Observation: field notes, 14/12/05)

Thirdly, I was used as a resource for English language teaching and learning. For example, in the class of 23/05/06, Von, a female British Indonesian teacher, was explaining the word ‘tights’ to the students,

(Jorge is a male Columbian student; Anastasia is a female Russian student.)

Von: What is ‘tights’?

Jorge, Anastasia (pointing at me): She is wearing tights.

Von: Yeah, F is wearing tights. I hope you don’t mind.

F: No, it’s fine. (Observation: field notes, 23/05/06)

Therefore, it was almost impossible for me to carry out totally non-participant observation in the language classroom. Although I wanted the language teachers and the students to ignore me as much as possible, I could not refuse to support them in the classroom in order to keep good relationships with them and to maintain a harmonious classroom atmosphere.

8.5.4 Struggle in data analysis

I felt my data analysis process was like a discovery journey, since there was no existing data analysis model, which could be adapted to my study directly in terms of the uniqueness of my data. Facing the massive text data, I struggled with a dilemma: to develop data analysis chapters on each participant with regard to the coherence of each participant's utterances and behaviour; or to develop data analysis chapters according to the focused topics, which include gender identity, national identity, social class identity and language learner identity. I decided to start with writing up a comprehensive chapter on each participant, which was an extremely time-consuming procedure. While completing this exercise, I found that the common themes shared by the six primary participants appeared to be clear and significant. So I finally wrote up four data analysis chapters based on these common themes, and drew comparisons across the six primary participants.

Following the constructivist paradigm, the data analysis of this present study did not aim to provide any linear argument leading ineluctably to an incontestable conclusion, or to make claims of any definitive truth. All the data presented in this thesis reflects some

aspects of the participants' identities and their English learning experiences in Britain. Through systematic data analysis, I gained some understanding and knowledge about Chinese learners' identities and their English learning experiences in Britain. But I am aware that my description and interpretation only reference the reality of Chinese learners' English language learning journeys in Britain in some way, and there are a range of other interpretive positions and explanations besides the ones presented in this thesis.

8.5.5 The multiple roles of the researcher

During my fieldwork, I played many other roles besides simply being a researcher, such as being a friend, an advisor, a learner, or a teacher's assistant. The various roles I played were always related to how the participants saw me, and I did not have complete freedom to decide which role I was willing to play. In some cases, I had to accept and play some unfavourable roles that were constructed by the participants to keep a friendly research atmosphere. This can be well illustrated by my dramatic experience on 17/01/06. During my two-hour observation in Spencer Language School, I was assigned to play three different roles — an inspector, a sympathetic listener and an advisor — according to the three participants' own agendas. This incident started with Xu's trouble with his new English language teacher, Von, who was a British Indonesian. In general, Xu disliked the way Von talked about China in her class and her English accent. He wanted to upgrade to an Intermediate English class, so that he could escape from Von's class, which was an Elementary English class. In this situation, I was asked by Nina, the Study Director, to find

out what happened between Xu and Von in the classroom.

Nina: F, Xu has told me many times that he wanted to change to an Intermediate class, but we think his oral English is not good enough to upgrade, although his grammar and writing are good enough to upgrade now. If his oral English doesn't improve, we can't put him into an Intermediate class. Since you are going to observe the class, could you give me your opinion after you finish your observation? (Talk with Nina, 17/01/06)

In order to fulfil Nina's requirement, I carried out a very different classroom observation from my regular practice. I not only made notes on the issues related to my research topics, but also paid special attention to Von's English accent, Von's interaction with Xu, and Xu's resistance to Von's requirements. The role I played as an inspector made both Von and me feel pressurised. After the class, Von explained her problem with Xu from her perspective,

Von: I think Xu is a very brilliant student, and he should achieve more than he has already achieved. He wanted to upgrade to Intermediate class. His oral English is not good enough to upgrade, although his grammar and writing is fine. He doesn't like to speak, and I have to push him hard. He doesn't like to take notes. This is not a good study habit. I don't know whether this is a common habit of Chinese students. I have taught several Chinese students before, and most of them, especially boys, didn't like to take notes.

F: Different Chinese students have different study habits. Maybe Xu hasn't seen the importance of taking notes. (Talk with Von, 17/01/06)

I found myself turning to be a sympathetic listener, and provided some explanations of Xu's 'misbehaviour' to Von. Then, I went to Nina's office, and reported my views on Von's English teaching practice and Xu's problem with Von to Nina. Nina made notes on what I said, and promised me that she would speak to Von and Xu respectively. Finally, I had to face the participant, Xu, and tried to persuade him to change his hostile attitude towards

Von.

F: I think Von is very responsible; otherwise she could just ignore you, rather than pushing you. I don't think she has a bias against China.

Xu: You have only been to her class once, and she might have paid attention to this, since you were in the class.

F: Her English is fine, and good enough to teach you. Why are you so critical?

Xu: Because I have paid the tuition fee. (Talk with Xu, 17/01/06)

This experience had indeed been something of a dilemma for me: I did not want to play a role of inspector in Von's class, and to make comments on Von's class to Nina and Xu in this way, since I did not want my participation and opinions changing the original situation; however, I wished the multiple roles I played besides being a researcher could help to solve the problem between Xu and Von. I wonder, given that ethnographic studies are carried out in natural social settings, in which all the participants bring their own agendas and their own ways of lives into the research, if it is almost impossible for the researcher to determine their own roles in such social settings according to their own wishes. Considering social lives are always multi-layered and complicated, the researcher may have to play multiple roles rather than a single role in their fieldwork.

8.6 Concluding comment

This present study suggests that inquiring into the transformation of Chinese learners' identities may be essential to understanding their English language learning journeys in Britain. I have tried through the previous chapters to portray the Chinese learners as people

with multiple identities within specific social contexts, using both SLL and social theories to analyse the data. I began this chapter summarising the findings on the relationship between the Chinese learners' identities and their English language learning and living experiences in Britain. I then offered some recommendations for English language learning and teaching practice, as well as for further research in the area of identity and SLL. Finally, I made my own comments on the research process.

I would like to conclude this thesis with a reflection on the following diary entry by Yin,

February 18, 2006

<Outside> — The theme song of 'Perhaps Love'

The outside world is very exciting,
Will I fail if I go outside?
The outside world is very generous,
I may gain a rebirth if I go outside.
I can't see the present if I stay here.
I want to go outside to look for my future.
It's difficult to stay when I decide to change.
I will leave when I blow out candles.
The outside world is very exciting,
I will become lovely if I go outside.
There are many opportunities available in the outside world,
I will find my own position.
I won't look back when I leave.
I will never come back when I leave.

PS: My friend recommended me to listen to this song. I find this song is quite suitable for the students studying abroad. It is not an excellent musical performance, but every word touches my heart deeply. (Yin's diary, 18/02/06)

The lyric quoted in Yin's diary entry may remind many Chinese learners of their

orientation towards taking study-abroad journeys, which promise them both the experience of a lifetime and the experience of the world. 'I won't look back when I leave' apparently reflects their determination to succeed in their study abroad journeys. 'I will never come back when I leave' might metaphorically indicate that they are no longer the same persons they were, when they left China.

For many Chinese learners, the journey of learning English in Britain is an adventure into seeing the outside world. The journey is unique as it provides them the opportunity to explore a new language, a new culture and a new society, and the chance to reinvent themselves. Each of these experiences is valuable and unforgettable, but perhaps the last one has the greatest influence on the Chinese learners' continuing lives.

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Appendix I: Interview Questions for Narrative Enquiry

The interview questions are drafted to invite the interviewee to tell their stories, to encourage them to take responsibility for the meaning of their talk, rather than ask the interviewee to report their opinions, and help me to check my sociological understandings through the reality of their own experiences. Hence, sociological questions are avoided in order to get the interviewee's particular deeper and broader life experiences.

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you learnt English in China/Britain?
3. What kind of English courses have you taken in Britain?
4. Tell me about your family.
5. Tell me about your boyfriend/girlfriend.
6. What does a typical Chinese woman/man mean to you?
7. Do you think you are a typical Chinese woman/man? Why or why not?
8. How did you decide to study English in Britain?
9. How did you decide to pursue further study in Britain?
10. Do you enjoy your life in Britain? Why or why not?
11. Do you have a part-time job? How did you decide to find a part-time job? Do you enjoy your part-time work? Why or why not?
12. Do you find any difference between studying English in China and in Britain? What's the difference? How do you feel about the difference?
13. Can you tell me an impressive English class you had in the language school? Why do you feel so? Can you recall a similar class in China? Why or why not? What's the difference?
14. Do you think you have changed in this period of staying in Britain? What is the change? And how did this change happen? (Do you think if you went back to China now, people would look at you in a different way? And how?)
15. Suppose you were a male/female Chinese student, would this make your English learning experience or living experience in Britain different? And how?
16. Do you think which social class you belong to? How does this perception influence your interaction with others?
17. Do you feel different between speaking English and speaking Chinese?
18. In which occasion, will you speak Chinese in the class?
19. Do you think Britain is an ideal place for learning English? Why or why not?

Appendix II: Examples of Field Notes

Tuesday, 1 November 2005

Space: Classroom 206 in Spencer Language School

Setting: Elementary

Time: 9:00 am — 11:30 am

Participants (the students' names are listed from the door to the inside classroom): Janet (tutor, female, British), David (student, male, Spanish), Marta (student, female, Spanish), Thanos (student, male, Greek), Aidmar (student, female, Mexican), Maria (student, female, Italian), Mehmet (student, male, Turkish), Bryant (student, male, Thai), and Xu (student, male, Chinese)

There is no desk in the classroom, but 10 chairs with writing boards. This classroom arrangement makes me feel uncomfortable and insecure. Everyone is totally exposed to each other, so I dare not observe other students directly. There is no other Chinese student in this classroom, except Xu. Without support from other Chinese students, I feel quite isolated and pressured.

Significant events in the class and my reflections:

1. Janet: David, would you like to spit out your chewing gum? I don't like students having chewing gum in my class.
2. (the researcher's role)
Janet asked the students to do self-introduction with their partners, since there were three new students joining in the class today.
Mehmet: Where do you come from, F?
Janet: Don't talk to F. She is just watching. Talk to Xu.
The teacher tried to make me totally non-participated in the classroom.
3. Bryant talked a lot with Mehmet, while Xu had little chance to speak.
4. Janet asked the students to read the textbook, and find the words she just mentioned.
Xu read the text, and tried to consult some words from his electronic dictionary,
Janet: No dictionary, Xu.
5. Janet asked the students to check the answer with their partners.
Xu: I haven't finished.
Janet: Do you understand?
Xu: Yes.
6. Janet took out her mirror, and looked at the lipstick she wore, saying, 'excuse me', then left the classroom for several minutes.
7. Janet: Write down the words of the food that you like, you hate, or you can cook.
Xu: Excuse me, what's the meaning of this word (pointing at it).
Janet: Restaurant?
Xu: Yes.

Janet: Coffee De China is a restaurant. It's not a shop, it's not a supermarket. It's some place where you eat. We talked about restaurant yesterday, and in last week, but you didn't ask me. He, he...(laughing)

8. (gender identity?)

Janet gave an example on how to do the exercise,

Thanos: Do you like beer?

Janet: I hate beer.

Xu: Why?

Janet: It tastes horrible.

9. Xu did the exercise with Bryant, Bryant asked questions, and explained his answers. Since Bryant spoke English with a strong accent, Xu could not understand him; they two failed to catch up each other for several times.

10. Janet: Tell me something about the other person.

Xu: He likes eat fish.

Janet: Say it again.

Xu: He likes eat fish.

Janet: Eating.

Xu: He likes eating fish.

11. I was sitting next to Xu in this class, so I could hear Xu clearly, but I could not look at his face frequently, as we were too closed to each other.

This was the first time I did classroom observation in Spencer Language School. Although it only took 15 minutes to walk from Crawley to Spencer, they were actually two different worlds. In Crawley, the teachers did not use textbooks, and they were friendlier to the students. The teacher shared sweets with students, and the researcher was treated as part of the classroom. On the contrary, textbooks were used in Spencer, the teacher emphasised more on being a teacher, and the researcher was totally treated as a non-participant member in the class.

Informal conversation after class:

Xu's host family is very kind, and they try to talk with Xu every evening. Xu has not got his bank account or mobile phone until now, because the procedure of opening a bank account is very complicated, and he cannot understand it. I agreed to accompany him to go to the bank tomorrow.

Monday, 14 November 2005

Space: Classroom 4 in Crawley Language School

Setting: Access Course (Academic Study Skills)

Time: 11:00 am — 12:30 am

Participants (the students' names are listed from the door to the inside classroom): Carl (tutor, male, British), Kim (student, female, South Korean), Fan, (student, female, Chinese), Lan (student, female, Chinese), Ke (student, female, Chinese), Jin (student, male, Chinese), Ivan (student, male, Russian), Ahmed (student, male, Iraqi), and me.

Informal conversation before class:

Fan: I went to Bluewater yesterday, and tried to buy some clothes. But all clothes there were either ugly, or quite feminine, I couldn't buy a skirt! In the end, I went back to high street, and bought a black cotton coat.

...

Fan and I were talking about some universities, which are excellent in media studies; Lan was coming in the classroom.

F: Do you want to study in the same university as your cousin?

Lan: No, I don't like the place she lives in.

F: You haven't seen her university?

Lan: No, the place she lives in is only ten minutes walk from her university, I don't like it, I don't like it! (Lan is jumping and shouting like a child)

...

Fan: See the picture in my mobile phone (the picture of Fan and Ke), I like two good friends sitting together.

Significant events in the class and my reflections:

1. Carl: Kim, you change your seat.

Kim: Yes, because I can't see the blackboard from there clearly.

Carl: You should eat more carrots, which are good for your eyes.

Kim: Carrot?

Carl: What is good for your eyes in Russia?

Ivan:...

Fan: Fish.

Carl: Can you draw a picture?

(Ivan was drawing a picture)

Carl: Oh, black berry.

My reflection: The initial discussion started with English cultural context, and then expanded to other cultural contexts of the students' home countries. Can this be identified as cross-cultural communication?

2. Jin came back to the class later, with a book called, 'Understanding Biology for Advanced Level'.

3. (the researcher's role)

Jin: What is 'N. T.'?

Carl: (reading the sentence) A good question, I'm not sure. Any idea about it? (looking at me)

F: I guess it might be some natural resource, which can produce gas.

4. (gender identity)

Jin: Where can I get my hair cut?

Carl: How much do you want to spend on your hair?

Jin: Thirty pounds.

Fan: I don't think your two Taiwanese friends want to spend so much on hair cut.

Carl: If you want to something very different, you go a bit more expensive men hair cut shop.

Jin: A particular men hair cut?

Carl: You want your hair cut by women?

Jin: No.

Carl: It's a very traditional thing in England. Men cut hair for men, and women cut hair for women.

Ke: You can go to London to cut your hair.

Carl: Yes, you can have more variety.

Ke: You can cut your hair in the China town in London.

Carl: Yes, when I was in Argentina, I usually cut my hair in China town, since it's the cheapest one. I usually go to 'Steven ...' to cut my hair. You go out of the school, then...

5. (the use of Chinese in the class)

Group work: Find out how to use the quotation to support or against your ideas, and how to begin a paragraph.

Carl: Can you go back to Jin?

...

Fan: Lan 最聪明，你快说。 Nowadays, more and more people use cars, however...

Ke: 你一句话就写了嘛!

Fan: 后面再写，不急。

(Lan is writing.)

Kim and Jin discussed mainly in English, with some Korean words, and both of them are writing at the same time.

6. (English learning)

Carl talked with me when the students were writing their sentences on the blackboard,

Jin: When can I think in English?

Carl: When you begin to dream in English, you begin to think in English.

Jin: When I listen to you, I have to translate what I have heard into Chinese.

Carl: Different people have different process. You have to work in your own grammar system.

After class, I asked Carl on how he thought that the course he was teaching was an ESL course or an EFL course. (see audio recordings)

Friday, 18 November 2005

Space: Classroom wf03 in Living Language Centre

Setting: General English Course

Time: 11:00 am — 12:30 am

Participants (the students' names are listed from the door to the inside classroom): Neal (tutor, male, British), Tony (observer, male, Tai), Nori (student, male, Japanese), Sinhui (student, male, South Korean), me, Yin (student, female, Chinese), Noriko (student, female, Japanese), Kaori (student, female, Japanese), Hee (student, female, South Korean), Han (student, female, Vietnamese), Musfa (student, male, Cypriot).

Before the class, Yin went to the Students Union to buy a cup of coffee with Noriko and me. We discussed about some Japanese, Chinese and South Korean films. Outside the Students Union, a young British student was sitting on a chair, and asked others to buy eggs and throw them to him for donation. Yin found it interesting, and tried one egg.

The topic of this class is about living abroad, including some refugees' experiences.

Significant events in the class and my reflections:

1. (national identity)

Yin: I felt embarrassed yesterday, because when Neal asked what kind of refugees there were in Japan, and they said, 'Chinese'. They said that Chinese came to Japan to earn money, and many Chinese worked as prostitutes there.

F: There are various reasons for a person becoming a refugee.

Yin: Yes, they didn't understand what a 'refugee' is, and used the word wrongly. They should have a comprehensive view of what is a 'refugee'.

2. (the researcher's role)

Noriko: What does this mean? 'a strange country'?

F: It means when you newly arrived in a country, you feel unfamiliar with the country.

Yin: In Chinese.

F: 一个陌生的国家。

3. Neal: You don't like English food?

Yin: I don't know any English food, except fish and chips.

Neal: Yes, England has bad fame for food.

4. Neal: Has anyone experienced racism in England?

Sinhui: When I was walking on the street, some boys shouted to me, 'bad boy! Jewish head!'

Neal: Oh, they thought you were a Jew. I think England is one of the most tolerant countries, but you still have some problems. I think the situation of racism is more general. In other European countries, you see more racism.

5. (the researcher's role)

Listening to the tape recording of a Mexican woman talking about how she adapted to the life in Britain. Yin found the tape recording quite difficult, and consulted electronic dictionary frequently. Yin felt sad, as she couldn't understand Neal's words, and

checked them with me.

6. (English language teaching, critical thinking)

Group discussion on 'In what ways do foreigners find it easy or difficult to adapt to life in your country?'

Yin: Usually, there are many foreigners in China, but I don't see many South Koreans. Japanese are very polite, while Americans and British are very funny. I don't know their customs, and I don't know anyone from other countries in China. We feel different to see different colour people.

Sinhui: Unfortunately, we have some people from Cambodia, and they are very poor.

Neal: You look a bit shocked.

F: Yes, how can he say 'unfortunately'? It's racist.

Neal: That's the interesting part of this kind of classrooms; you have the students from various countries and backgrounds, so they have quite different ideas.

F: Do you think the teacher has the responsibility to show the students a broad view of the world, and how to see a situation in a more comprehensive way?

Neal: That's the responsibility of secondary school teachers. I am not going to comment on their opinions.

7. (the researcher's role)

In this class, Tony participated a lot in this classroom. He answered the teacher's questions, and discussed with other students. Since his English level was much more advanced than other students, his participation had changed the original teaching process. In this case, his participant observation had disturbed the research context.