

Perceptions of Mainland Chinese University Students of Studying in Singapore.

**Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Education
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by

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Declaration

This thesis is my own work and no part of it has been submitted for a degree at this, or any other, university.



ONG Soon Leong, Jason

Abstract

This thesis investigates why Mainland Chinese university students choose to study in Singapore, and how they manage the experience. The study was guided by two research questions: (1) Why do university students from Mainland China choose to study in Singapore? (as opposed to elsewhere) and (2) How do Mainland Chinese university students manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment?

The aim of the study and the research questions made an interpretivist paradigm with qualitative research methods most appropriate. The study also adopted a symbolic interactionist perspective, realising that people make sense of their lives and experiences through interaction with others around them. Grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis were used.

Participants were 20 Mainland Chinese university students studying in the two main universities in Singapore, namely, the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU), including its affiliate, the National Institute of Education (NIE). Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and documents (diary entries) lasting 16 months.

The grounded theory that emerged, called the theory of ‘selective pragmatism’, comprises a threefold typology of students and four categories, with the second category presented in two parts. The typology of participants conceptualises and labels the three groups as “the intellectuals”, “the opportunists” and “the loyalists”. The four categories are respectively: (1) Push Factors; (2a) Pull Factors (Other countries outside Mainland China, but excluding Singapore); (2b) Pull Factors (Singapore only); (3) Individual Resilience and (4) Future Intentions. The study shows how participants exercise choices and decisions in a pragmatic but selectively different way in responding to the two research questions. Three distinctively different patterns of responses emerge to form the basis of the threefold typology.

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CHAPTER ONE

Statement of the Problem

1.0 Introduction

This thesis sets out to answer the questions: (1) Why do university students from Mainland China choose to study in Singapore? (as opposed to elsewhere) and (2) How do Mainland Chinese university students manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment?

In order to study the phenomenon in-depth, twenty Mainland Chinese university students were selected to participate in the study. They are students studying at Singapore's two main universities – the NUS, the NTU and its affiliate, the NIE. A profile of these three institutions is presented in chapter three.

This introductory chapter presents an overview of the thesis. First, it explains the background and context to the problem in section 1.1. In section 2, the research aims and purposes are discussed. The third section sets out the research questions. Fourth, the outcomes of the research are presented. Finally, a brief outline is given of the chapter structure to the thesis.

1.1 The Research Problem

The United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) lead the world in terms of hosting the largest number of international students. International students have a significant economic impact on these countries. According to a New York Times report, “foreign students contribute US\$13 billion to the American economy annually” (Dillon, 2004). The same report, quoting a survey in 2002, says that there were about 586,000 foreign students in America and 270,000 in Britain, the world's second largest higher education destination (Dillon, 2004). The mobility of

international students worldwide is expected to rise for many more years to come, their numbers boosted by the developing economies in India and Mainland China. Both countries are said to be the world's biggest exporters of tertiary students to the USA.

In Singapore, the then Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry (now Prime Minister), Brigadier-General (Res.) Lee Hsien Loong, in his Economic Review Report in 1986, recommended the intake of foreign students as a means of reviving the sluggish economy. In 2003, he had recommended in his 2nd Economic Review Report that the number of foreign students in Singapore be increased from 50,000 in 2002 to 150,000 by 2012. The plan by the Singapore authorities to triple the number of foreign students in Singapore from the current 50,000, will add another 5 per cent to the GDP. At present, education contributes 1.9 per cent to the GDP or SGD3 billion (Davie, 2004). Clearly, educating overseas students would provide a huge boost to the economy.

Singapore has several advantages which make it attractive to foreign students. Its Asian culture and Western-style of education (with English as the primary medium of instruction) are well-placed to capture a sizable number of students from Asia, especially from Mainland China. Singapore's multi-racial, multi-cultural and mostly bi-lingual population of Indians, Malays and Chinese is also a natural attraction to students from India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. At the same time, Singapore's Chinese majority attracts Mainland Chinese students who feel they are likely to be more readily accepted there than in the West.

1.1.1 Why do overseas mainland Chinese students present a research problem?

Mainland Chinese students and their educational institutions have been embroiled in many social and political problems since the last imperial system ended in 1912 (Schell, 1990). In order to understand the educational system which the participants of this study inherited, I shall trace the events leading up to the formation of the People's Republic of China since the research problem needs to be understood in historical context.

When Chairman Máo Zédōng (Máo; 毛澤東) led his communist party into

power and declared the country to be the new People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, he inherited some of the finest universities of higher learning in this region, namely, Peking (Beijing) University built in 1898 (Peking, 2006); Tsinghua University, built in 1911 (Tsinghua, 2006) and Nankai University built in 1919 (Nankai, 2006).

In 1950, Máo sought the help of the Soviet Union to rebuild its war-ravaged economy. Within five years "there were around 10,000 Soviet advisers and technicians working in China" (Merson, 1989, p. 227). During the same time, about 37,000 undergraduates, graduates and technicians were sent to the Soviet Union for education and training. The aim was to create as many schools modelled on the Soviet system as quickly as possible (Merson, 1989, pp. 227-229).

Unfortunately, it was not known then that the education system in the Soviet Union was badly flawed. In 1956, during the 20th Congress of the Communist party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Nikita S. Khrushchev, leader of the Soviet Union, criticised the state of education in the summary report when he said: "The serious fault in our schools is that teaching is to a certain extent out of touch with reality..." (Gu, 2001, p. 120). This led to the education reforms in the Soviet Union which lasted from 1958 to 1964 and which also ended in failure (Gu, 2001, p. 127).

Around 1953, Máo became disenchanted with the industrialisation policy of the Soviet Union because it neglected the peasants from whom Máo's red army was drawn. Máo gradually implemented his own industrialisation policies simultaneously with agricultural production. The Russians disagreed with Máo's policies and relations began to deteriorate. In the spring and summer of 1958, Máo called for a 'Great Leap Forward (GLF)' in economic development. He wanted Mainland China to catch up with Britain, an advanced industrial power, in fifteen years. The whole nation was gripped with such fervour that some thought Máo's policy was heading for imminent success (Gilley, 1998, p. 43). The illusion was fanned by false reports of high production growth (Moise, 1986). During the same period, a senior communist official named *Kang* went around the country preaching the new communist ideology of 'Great Educational Leap Forward,' which would parallel progress in agriculture and industry by integrating education with labour. The Ministry of Education was ridiculed as an oppressive institution (Byron & Pack, 1992, p. 231). Ironically, this was part of the education reform in 1958 where 'a comprehensive new strategy of mass mobilisation

for economic development was introduced by Chinese leaders and called the Great Leap Forward' (Pepper, 1991).

In 1959, Máo's experiment with the GLF began to fall apart, sending the nation reeling into disaster on an unprecedented scale. Famine swept through the country, killing about 30 million people from 1959 to 1961 (Ash, 1996, p. 30). Merson (1989, p. 235) estimates the numbers to be about 20 million. During this time, relations between Moscow and Beijing reached breaking point. In 1960, the Russian engineers and technical advisers returned to Moscow with their industrial blueprints, spare-parts and left behind hundreds of incomplete industrial projects in Mainland China (Snow, 1972, p. 127).

Máo realised his policies had brought chaos to the country and voluntarily handed the running of the economy to Liu Shaoqi [Liu; 劉少奇] and Deng Xiaoping [Deng; 鄧小平] (William, 1985, p. 21).

The new leaders at the helm reversed many of Máo's policies. Education became paramount. The educated were to get the best jobs with the highest pay. The children of revolutionary cadres could gain admission to good schools easily compared to children of ordinary workers and poor peasants who had to meet somewhat higher academic standards to win admission (Moise, 1986, pp. 156-157). A series of other manoeuvres by the new leaders irked Máo because he saw the revolutionary leadership of workers and peasants being overwhelmed by the emerging class of intellectuals and technocrats. Ironically, it was Máo himself (in 1956) who declared a new movement called: "One hundred flowers should bloom and one hundred schools of thought contend" (Gu, 2001). This was to encourage the intellectuals to take a more active role in planning the next phase of national development and to criticise the progress made so far. The emboldened intellectuals and academics began to ridicule Máo for the chaos brought on by his failed GLF. The bickering peaked in 1966 when Máo saw a play written by the Deputy Mayor of Beijing, Wu Han. The play was called *Hai Rui dismissed from office*, a story about an intelligent and righteous official of the Ming Dynasty, devoted to the welfare of the people, who was dismissed from office by an egotistical emperor. Máo drew parallels between this play and how he had once purged

a loyal and righteous Minister of Defence, Peng Dehuai in 1959 (Moise, 1986, p. 160). Seeing the play as a personal attack on him, Máo soon planned his comeback.

In May 1966, Máo launched his ‘Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’ (GPCR) (Merson, 1989, p. 247). Mainland China entered a new and very difficult era and a further round of social upheaval and massive destruction of the education system, especially institutions of higher learning (Gu, 2001, p.75). It ended soon after the demise of Máo in September, 1976 (William, 1985, p. 31).

During much of the GPCR period and under a propaganda slogan ‘better red than expert’, “schools, universities and colleges across the country were closed” (Merson, 1989, p. 247). A massive round-up of intellectuals, reactionary and bourgeois teachers began. *Bourgeois* was a derogatory term for someone described as a member of the middle class, especially those who are interested in material possessions and social position. Amongst them was the botanist Cao Zongxun. As Merson (1989, p. 247) recounts it, “Professor Cao Zongxun was dragged from her laboratory at Beijing University and paraded through the streets of Beijing with a tall dunce hat.” Her crime was said to be experimenting with growing small cucumbers in test-tubes, which was part of her research on a pollination programme; the revolutionary red guards saw this as ridiculous because children could have grown it in fields. Professor Cao and many of her scientific colleagues were packed off to be re-educated in special ‘May 7th cadre schools’ in the countryside where they worked with the peasants so that they would come to appreciate the correct revolutionary consciousness. She was considered fortunate because many of her compatriots were badly tortured, humiliated and killed (Merson, 1989, p. 248). Byron & Pack (1992) noted: “Writers were forced to burn their libraries, book by book; art collectors saw their paintings ripped to pieces and their porcelain smashed” (Byron & Pack, 1992, p. 309). Merson (1989) noted the complete reversal of roles between the literate and the illiterates when he states: “...an illiterate abattoir worker was put in charge of the Shanghai Institute of Biochemistry, which only the previous year had been the first in the world to synthesise insulin” (p. 249). As Lewin, Little, Xu & Zheng (1994, p. 3) state: “The principal apparent motive which lay behind Mao Zedong’s virtual destruction of the earlier school structure was the provision of better opportunities for children of proletarian class background.” This statement seems to support Gu’s argument that Máo was not against education *per se*,

but rather for the proletarian class who were treated unequally and denied proper education at that time. The massive purging of the bourgeois intellectuals lasted from mid-1966 to April 1969 (Snow, 1972, p. 23), but the GPCR ended only in 1976.

After a brief power struggle, Deng Xiaoping acceded to power in July 1976 (Moise, 1986, p. 191). In 1978, the new administration initiated economic reforms based on four socialist modernisations of agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology (Lewin et al., 1994, p. 12). Deng said: “the key to modernisation lies in science and technology and the key to these lies in education” (Pepper, 1991). The tertiary level of education is therefore once again the favoured sector. In 1979 thousands of professors, scientists, writers, artists and other intellectuals, who were exiled to the countryside to be re-educated by peasants during the GPCR, were considered rehabilitated and returned to their position of honour (Vohra, 2000, p. 261). Throughout Máo’s era only a small group of students were sent to Britain to study – this was at the end of 1972 (Moise, 1986, p. 187). As Deng reintroduced his economic and reform policies, more than 90,000 students were sent abroad to learn scientific and technological skills from the capitalist countries between 1978 to 1989 with about 80,000 going to the USA (Vohra, 2000). Ironically, the students who returned became frustrated with the slow pace of reforms and their anger exploded in the mass student protests of Tiananmen Square on May 4, 1989. The rebellion was forcefully put down the following month. The former Premier Li Peng of Mainland China later told Singapore’s then Prime Minister (now Minister Mentor), Lee Kuan Yew (Lee), that they lacked experience in handling the Tiananmen incident (Elegant & Elliot, 2005).

Indeed, the new administration was still trying to figure out how the world economy functioned. As Deng related to Lee at the time: “You cross the river feeling for one pebble at a time” (Elegant & Elliot, 2005). The incident in Tiananmen seemed to have halted all the economic and education reforms which Deng and his new administration had painstakingly tried to implement since they resumed office in 1976. Deng’s visit to Singapore in November 1978 was borne out of a geopolitical strategy to counter the Vietnamese, who were then threatening to invade Cambodia. During this visit, Deng saw the transformation of Singapore, which he had visited some 58 years previously. What he saw impressed him beyond measure. In 1979, Deng said in a

speech that he had learnt many economic lessons from Singapore and how the system had benefited its people (Lee, 2000, pp. 668-669). Among the Chinese officials to visit Singapore was a Shanghai mayor Jiang Zemin, who visited Singapore in 1980. He later became the president of the PRC.

While the world waited to see what would happen after the crackdown in Tiananmen, Deng reappeared in Shenzhen, Guangdong, in 1992 with great fanfare and exhorted the people to catch up with Asia's Four Dragons (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan) in 20 years, not only in economics, but also in social order and social climate' (Lee, 2000, p. 714). In particular, Deng wanted his people to "Learn from Singapore," and "Do better than them" (Elegant & Elliot, 2005). Deng's endorsement of Singapore led to the island nation becoming a model for learning, hosting many official and unofficial delegations from China. Deng's economic and education reform policies implemented in 1978 were back on track and the economy was growing at an unprecedented scale.

Rampant economic growth continued through the 1990s and into the 21st century. The Wall Street Journal reports: "In 2005, China emerged as the world's third-largest trading nation. Its 2004 current account surplus jumped 50 percent to [US]\$68.7 billion - more than 10 percent of total exports. The Chinese government reports that 2004 GDP growth continued at a robust rate of 9.5 percent" (The Heritage Foundation, 2006a). However, with a population of 1.3 billion people, the per capita income remains at a low US\$1,179. A large proportion of those who live outside the cities remain poor. This poses a challenge to the funding of the education reforms essential to modernisation. If there are not enough funds for education reforms, how are they to carry out further modernisation plans? Former Vice-Premier Li Lanqing provides a candid, but gloomy, picture of the education landscape when he was tasked to head the education portfolio. He identified three major issues to be tackled. They were: (1) Teacher's pay; (2) Housing and (3) Funding for education. In regards to salary arrears owing to academics, Li (2005) relates:

I remember clearly an outstanding problem that I faced shortly after taking office in 1993: the nation was in arrears with the salaries of primary and secondary school teachers to the tune of 1.4 billion Yuan [Chinese currency]. This made me feel very guilty. Their pay was already a pittance and yet even this was not being delivered on time. How could we possibly keep education going? (p. 8).

With regards to the appalling living conditions of the academics and their families, Li (2005, p. 8) provided an example of what he saw during his visit to Central University for Nationalities. He was shocked to find sixty-six families, comprising workers, lecturers and even associate professors living in quarters within the campus that comprised a number of makeshift houses with tarpaper on the roofs held down with bricks. There were no drains or gutters, so rainwater had formed large pools. Li was in for another shock when one of the officials said, “these families were lucky to have even these houses, because there were plenty of others with no housing at all.” As for the solution to these problems, Li (2005) says:

Ours is a developing country with nearly 1.3 billion people and a relatively backward economy, yet we are running the largest education system in the world. Given our limited national strength, our spending on education will continue to fall short of actual needs for a long time (p. 10).

The gravity of the problem was fuelled by the booming population. In 1953, the first modern census shows that the population was somewhere around 583 million (Snow, 1972, p. 49). The number had risen to about 1.3 billion people in 2005 (Li, 2005). This was an increase of about 717 million people or about 123 per cent in a span of just 52 years. In other words, in about half a century, Mainland China has produced more than double the population of USA whose population stood at 296 million people in 2004 (The Heritage Foundation, 2006b). The strain this demographic puts on

China's education system at all levels is immense. No wonder many are driven to look abroad for opportunities.

As the economy continued to grow at a healthy rate (9 per cent per annum), a new middle income group was also growing rapidly. This translates into higher demand for better education. In view of the many problems within the education system, demand for foreign education inevitably became a very attractive alternative.

In summary, it is quite clear that the present generation of university students have inherited an education system and environment that has been long troubled by many social and political upheavals in the country. The ravaged economy, the destruction of educational institutions and books on a national scale and academics who had possibly lost touch with advanced research and technology after having spent 13 years of their life on the farms – all opened up a Pandora's box of questions that are yet to be answered. Some of the many questions are: (1) How were the participants in this study educated in such an environment? (2) What kind of syllabus were they using, since books were burnt on a national scale? (3) How could their lecturers teach them modern technology, when they themselves had been out of touch for so many years? (4) How did lecturers and students keep pace with modern technology? (5) How did the students cope when they went abroad to study? And (6) What kind of culture did they grow up in, since the principles of Confucius were severely attacked during the GPCR? These problems are illuminated by the encounters Lee Kuan Yew had with some American-educated Chinese professors in a university in Wuhan (one of China's major industrial cities) whom Lee felt were men of "erudition and quality". Accompanying him on this visit was his daughter, Lee Wei Ling (who was then a medical student). She encountered a young man, in the same city, reading an English-language biology textbook that was printed in the 1950s. She was incredulous (Lee, 2000, pp. 684-685).

The combination of all the above and the little that is known about Mainland Chinese students certainly poses an interesting research problem for this study, especially now that Mainland Chinese students are heading towards Singapore and other overseas destinations by the tens of thousands.

1.2 Research aims and purposes

These problems add to the question as to why Mainland Chinese university students flow into Singapore in large numbers to seek educational excellence. The two countries' differences relative to their cultural influence, age, history and size make the phenomenon intriguing.

In terms of cultural influence, Mainland China boasts great names, like Confucius, whose teaching not only goes back to 500 B.C. but has stood the test of time in many Asian cultures today. In terms of technology, Mainland China boasts of being a nuclear-powered country. Furthermore, Singapore as a political entity is only about 40 years old compared to China, which is more than 5,000 years old. Why is such a relatively insignificant country like Singapore able to attract an influx of 15,000 students from Mainland China? The number is believed to have increased to 33,000 in 2005 (Davie, 2005b). This raises further questions. Why did these students choose to study in Singapore, instead of elsewhere, including the mainland itself? And how do they manage their study in a different country and culture? While the increase in GDP is a significant contribution to Singapore's economy, very little is known about the many issues concerning the 'uprooting' of the university students from Mainland China to the 'replanting' of them in a different culture, namely, Singapore, and at a key stage in their young lives. Cultural differences may well be at the heart of these issues of adjustment (See Appendix 'I' for a discussion on the problematic nature of defining culture). The study will be restricted to Mainland Chinese university students, who are either doing their basic degree, master's degree or doctoral degree in Singapore.

1.3 Research questions

Apart from the two primary research questions already mentioned, the study is further broken down into six specific research questions. They are as follows:

Research Question 1 (RQ1):

Why do university students from Mainland China choose to study in Singapore? (As opposed to elsewhere).

Specific Research Question 1 (SRQ 1):

Does the education environment in China prompt them to seek education overseas?

Specific Research Question 2 (SRQ 2):

Are there distinct differences in the education system of China and Singapore? If so, what are they?

Specific Research Question 3 (SRQ 3):

In deciding to further their education in Singapore, what are the key factors in their decision making? (e.g. cost, social security, quality education and language)

Research Question 2 (RQ2):

How do Mainland Chinese university students manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment?

Specific Research Question 4 (SRQ 4):

In their quest for quality education in Singapore, how do students manage their university study?

Specific Research Question 5 (SRQ 5):

In their desire to cope with their studies in the Singapore environment, how do they manage their studies after their normal university hours?

Specific Research Question 6 (SRQ 6):

In the Singapore environment, how do the students cope with their daily lives while being far away from home?

1.4 Significance and outcomes of the research

No previous study has been made, or theory generated, of why mainland Chinese students choose Singapore to study, and how they manage the experience. The significance of this research is the ‘grounded theory’ of ‘Selective Pragmatism’ that emerges from the study.

The findings and implications from the study should provide private and public policy-makers both in, and out of, Singapore with an understanding of how to cater better to the demands and expectations of these students. In particular it is worthy of note that the participants have shown that they belong to a very different generation of Mainland Chinese compared to their predecessors. Amongst the many qualities they each possess is that they are selectively pragmatic.

One of the major difficulties that the participants had encountered was language. The participants found Singapore’s English or ‘Singlish’ very baffling. They were even baffled with the way the Chinese language is spoken in Singapore. This was because Singaporeans tend to pepper their sentences with a variety of other languages. An example is when a Singaporean speaks English, sentences tend to include some words of the Chinese language, and sometimes with some other local dialects. The same problem applies when a Singaporean speaks the Chinese language. As the universities are also staffed with academics from around the world, some of their accents also contribute to the woes of the participants. Almost all the participants found the ‘Indian’ accent the most difficult. The word ‘Indian’ is in inverted commas because it was not always clear whether the participants were referring to Singapore Indians or Indians from the south Asian countries. The problem the participants encountered with the Indian accent was serious enough for some of them to avoid attending the lectures. Some even had difficulties with the accents of their own Mainland Chinese lecturers teaching at the NTU. However, those who had attended the bridging course at NIE, prior to joining their degree programs with NTU, found that they were better prepared for the cultural shock.

Apart from these language difficulties, the participants found the transition from their teacher-centred learning in Mainland China to student-centred learning in Singapore very difficult. The need to do much of the learning themselves created tremendous pressure on them. Their problems with the English language and all the foreign accents around them made learning even more stressful. On top of all these issues – and also because of them -- many Mainland Chinese students found social interaction too demanding. They simply could not integrate themselves with local students because of the differences in language and personal interests.

These problems were not anticipated by the Mainland Chinese students. They had come to Singapore, firstly, because they had been offered generous scholarships and grants. Secondly, they were aware that Singapore universities offered a very high quality of education. Many of the participants would have no problem qualifying for the top universities in their own country even if they had not got offers from Singapore. It was the quality of education that attracted them – and this was also the main consideration for those who were self-sponsored.

On the other hand, most participants did not have a strong desire to remain in Singapore after they graduated. Although the participants have said that they may stay a little longer if they are able to find well-paid jobs in Singapore, the findings show that most of them share a similar perception that Singapore does not offer as many prospects as those back home. This study will examine some ways in which they may be encouraged to stay on after their studies in order to contribute to Singapore's economy.

1.5 Researcher's positioning in respect of the research

The researcher's interest in this study was prompted by many years of professional experience in the recruitment of students, especially from Mainland China and Vietnam. However, this research will only focus on Mainland Chinese university students studying in Singapore so that an in-depth focus can be maintained.

The researcher has also had first-hand experience of Chinese universities and a strong familiarity with Singapore universities.

1.6 Limitations of the study

Data for the study were collected from 20 Mainland Chinese student studying at the two main universities in Singapore. The main forms of data collection were the use of semi-structured interviews and participants' diaries. There are a number of methodological limitations owing to the small sample.

A small number of participants was chosen, because the purpose of this study is to build a theory for the group of students interviewed. There was no intention to generalise the research across a complex country of more than 1 billion people. This research therefore focuses on the in-depth study of a few information-rich participants to improve our understanding of Mainland Chinese university students studying in Singapore. The results and findings of the study can only be applied directly to the group of students studied. However, in describing the students' contexts and personal details in depth, it may be possible for other students in similar situations to draw parallels between themselves and the students studied in this research investigation.

A further limitation is the collection of data via interviews and documents submitted by the participants. In the case of interviews, the data is wholly dependent on what the participants choose to reveal. It is difficult to know whether the participants had any hidden agendas in their responses. The dialogue can only be taken in good faith and at face value. The researcher made strenuous efforts to cross-check their views by approaching the same issues from different lines of questioning and triangulation. In addition, the contentious issue of interviewer bias cannot be totally eliminated. Similarly, the data from the diary entries also has its limitations. The reason is that diaries are often merely text without emotion. It can be difficult therefore to gauge the intensity of how the participants feel in a particular situation. An example of this could be the phrase "I'm sad and lonely today". A text like this bears no further meaning apart from what is stated. The researcher is in no position to judge the intensity of the person's sadness or what the person will do to get out of this negative mood. The researcher has to accept the data in the diaries at face value because there is

no way to judge the authenticity of what has been recorded. Although the interview may clarify certain vague points, it is almost impossible to fully eradicate the ambiguity of the language (Fontana & Frey, 1994). It is for reasons of this nature that the in-depth study requires a lot more time, patience and constant interaction with the participants in checking and counter-checking the data in order to ensure that ambiguity in the data is filtered out as much as possible. This is often done through additional meetings with the participants. In this case, these meetings were usually at lunch time when most of the students were available for a casual chat. These chats were not recorded because the noise from the lunch time crowd prevented taped conversation. The gist of the conversations (memos) was immediately transferred to the computer as soon as opportunity permitted. These were sometimes counter-checked with other participants. Time and budget were key limitations to this research.

The limitation of time involved both the researcher and the participants, more importantly the latter. Every participant had a time frame that they would allow for being in the university. Some were soon to graduate and leave Singapore altogether. Hence, any necessary verification of data would prove to be very difficult, if not impossible. As the two stages of data collection required the participants to contribute a fair amount of their time in the interviews and recording of two weekly diaries on a daily basis, any lengthening of the data collection exercise might very quickly mean loss of interest in participation. The interviewer, too, spent a considerable number of hours interviewing, transcribing, collating and analysing the data over a period of about 16 months. The transcript and diaries alone covered about 651 pages of data. The study also faced a budget constraint because the research was unfunded.

Besides the saturation of data being a factor in determining the sample size, the above budgetary and time restrictions also limited the number of participants to 20. This proved a manageable number for a single researcher to handle.

1.7 Outline of chapters

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The initial introduction and abstract provides a preview of the whole thesis. Chapter Two is a review of relevant literature

covering all pertinent aspects to the study, including education in Mainland China and Mainland Chinese students overseas. Chapter Three defines and justifies the methodology underpinning the study. Chapter Four, Five and Six report on the findings of the study and Chapter Seven consists of a summary and conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This literature review will focus on the reasons why international students seek education overseas and the kinds of problems they encounter. The aim is to establish a context within which the more specific focus on Mainland Chinese students studying overseas and in Singapore can be understood.

For these purposes, a literature review is used to “stimulate theoretical sensitivity by providing concepts and relationships that are checked out against actual data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 49-50). According to Punch (1998, p. 43), it may be used “as part of the research planning and question developing stage.” However, the major part of the literature review in this study was deliberately delayed because the grounded theory approach in research dictates that the theory must be grounded in the data and not in data from elsewhere, including secondary literature. In addressing the two main research questions, it is expedient to recognise key themes as ways of organising relevant literature. In terms of the first research question, ‘why do university students from Mainland China choose to study in Singapore?’ (as opposed to elsewhere), these themes include political history as well as economic and demographic factors. The phenomenon is then compared with the ethnic Chinese in other East Asian and South East Asian countries. In terms of the second research question, ‘How do Mainland Chinese university students manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment?’ these themes will include how they adapt to local language colloquialisms and an unfamiliar learning, social and cultural environment.

2.1 Why do university students from Mainland China choose to study in Singapore? (As opposed to elsewhere)

To understand the phenomenon in depth, this literature review will include the circumstances in the country that contribute to Mainland Chinese students seeking higher learning overseas. These are presented according to the: (1) recent political history since 1949, and its effects on Mainland Chinese students going abroad; (2) Economic growth and demand for skilled educated labour force; (3) Population growth and demand for education in Mainland China (4) Minorities and education; (5) Elite academics and student demand for better higher education overseas; and (6) Research on why Chinese students (outside Mainland China) choose to seek higher education overseas.

2.1.1 *Recent political history in Mainland China since 1949, and its effects on Mainland Chinese students going abroad.*

Li (2005, p. 5) reports that schools were closed during the 10 years of Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR), which ended in 1976. Merson (1989, p. 247) reported that the closure included universities and colleges. It is therefore necessary to understand how these political events and the series of education reforms affects Mainland Chinese students' decision to seek education overseas.

The first five-year reform plan in Mainland China ended in 1957. During this period the reform was modelled on Soviet style industrialisation and education (Pepper, 1991, p. 22). The whole plan did not end well, as discussed in Chapter One, due partly to the political squabbling with the Soviets and the flawed Soviet education system that Máo relied on. The wholesale import of the Soviet Union system was similar to what Dimmock (1998) has called 'policy cloning'. This was a risk, perhaps unknown in Máo's time, because as Dimmock (2000, p. 13) says: "What works in one culture may not work in another." This provides an interesting question as to whether Máo's failure to observe the importance of cross-cultural sensitivities contributed to the failure of his

‘policy cloning’ from the Soviets (See Appendix ‘I’ for a discussion on the problematic nature of defining culture).

The 1958 educational reform plan was “introduced as part of a comprehensive new strategy of mass mobilisation for economic development, which Chinese leaders named the Great Leap Forward” (Pepper, 1991, p. 23). In the preceding chapter it was discussed how this reform, too, ended in failure with very serious consequences for education, especially in higher learning. As mentioned earlier, this led to the closure of schools, universities and colleges (Merson, 1989, p. 247).

In 1978, the new administration, led by Deng Xiaoping, initiated economic reforms based on four socialist modernisations of agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology (Lewin et al., 1994, p. 12). In 1985, the central committee of the communist party of China announced a five point reform of education (Lewin et al., 1994, p. 231). This was by far the most far-reaching education reform since the GPCR. This reform had a significant impact on the number of students going abroad for education between the periods of 1978 to 1989. It was mentioned earlier that during this period, more than 90,000 students were sent abroad to learn scientific and technological skills from the capitalist countries between 1978 to 1989 with about 80,000 going to the USA (Vohra, 2000). According to Orleans (1988, p. 9), the U.S. Department of State issued about 56,000 visas to visiting scholars and students from the People’s Republic of China between 1979 and 1987. By the end of 1989, about 33,000 out of the official figure of 90,000, had returned to Mainland China (Hayhoe, 1991, p. 134).

However, between late 1986 and early 1987, students in Mainland China were again embroiled in another political upheaval in the country. In the USA, about 1,000 Chinese expressed concern about the dismissal of Hu Yaobang, General Secretary of the Communist Party (Orleans, 1988, p. 2). The students’ demands and protests led to a confrontation in Tiananmen Square in 4 June 1989. It may be of interest to note that the Square is big enough to hold 1 million people standing shoulder to shoulder. When the government moved in to clear the protesters, a bitter struggle ensued between students and the violent suppression resulted in many lives being lost. As Gu (2001, p. 22) states: “... this was a difficult time for the educational, artistic and intellectual community in China, when many of the new horizons that had opened up seemed in

danger of closing once again.” In February 1992, Deng Xiaoping reappeared in Shenzhen with a great fanfare which reassured the world that all was well again in Mainland China and reform would continue. In February 1993, a new wave of education reforms was introduced (Gu, 2001, p. 22). This perhaps held the best hope for Mainland China to catch up with the developed world, especially in the area of higher learning. After 10 years of reform, much was achieved in the education sector, at least in terms of infrastructure and equipment in some institutions of higher learning. The impressive economic reforms brought much prosperity to the country, but it was still reliant on interest-free loans from the World Bank and other international financial institutions to finance its development in education and agriculture (Li, 2005, p. 12). This national funding for education reached a staggering 548 billion *yuan* (Mainland Chinese currency that is also known as Renminbi) in 2002 (Li, 2005, p. 24). Given the size of the country, however, significant improvements will take a long time to be felt.

Another troubling thought was whether past problems would fade away or return to stifle the growth of education again. As Pepper (1991) looking at the circumstances within the country lamented: “The ‘ghosts’ (the many past problems in Mainland China) will thus be around for many years to come” (p. 34).

While the uncertainty may be swept aside as just a political illusion, the severe limitations of education reform in catering for such a huge population meant the problem assumes immediate concern. Student expectations and aspirations have been growing exponentially with better schooling, the Internet and awareness of China’s international economic competitiveness. As the desire for high-quality education grows, so too the desire to travel since Mainland Chinese students equate overseas education with better prospects and better recognition (Orleans, 1988, p. 28).

2.1.2 Economic growth and demand for a skilled educated labour force.

In 1978, Deng Xiaoping explained the need for Mainland China to carry out political and economic reforms, failing which “modernisation and socialism will be ruined” (Merson, 1989, p. 265). Deng said: “the key to modernisation lies in science and technology and the key to these lies in education” (Pepper, 1991). This idea is

similar to many capitalist countries that use science and technology to boost production (Gu 2001). This inevitably leads to sudden shortages in skilled labour. One of the first solutions to this problem was the release of academics and intellectuals previously exiled to the countryside to be re-educated by peasants during the GPCR (Vohra, 2000, p. 261). During the same period, “Deng Xiaoping and other Communist leaders had courted intellectuals as important agents of reform” (Calhoun, 1994, p. 263). The problem was that many of this skilled educated labour force had lost 10 years of their ‘education curve’ and the need to operate new technology required new training (Merson, 1989, p. 270). Lewin et al. (1994, p. 17) state: “In the 1980s it was clear that the stock of qualified manpower fell short of that needed for technological restructuring.”

Nevara (2003) says: “As China's economy grows, the need for educated, white-collar workers increases. Although new universities are opening in China, the country still does not at the moment have enough universities to meet this demand for higher education.” This creates a demand for overseas higher education among Chinese students. China Economic Net (2006) citing data from UNESCO reported that 120,000 Mainland Chinese students go abroad for studies annually. It is therefore likely that the demand for skilled labour in Mainland China is expected to intensify for decades to come. As Orleans (1988, pp. 28-29) states: “it will be a long time before the study-abroad fever subsides.”

2.1.3 Population growth and demand for education in Mainland China

In the preceding chapter, it was stated that the population in Mainland China increased from 583 million in 1953 (Snow, 1972, p. 49) to 1.3 billion in 2005 (Li, 2005). Li (2005, p. 25) estimated that 16 million students could have been enrolled in different types of higher education. Out of this, “9.03 million were attending regular colleges and universities.” The strain this demographic puts on China’s education system at all levels is immense.

As the central administration in the country scrambles to improve the education infrastructure, they are also hard-pressed to expand the intake capacity of the

universities to cater to the ever increasing population. This poses a critical problem of increasing quantity at the expense of quality. Massive spending on research projects -- increasing from 3.2 billion *yuan* in 1993 to 21.96 billion *yuan* in 2002 (Li, 2005, p. 201) -- has hitherto failed to satisfy demands for higher quality from a growing middle class. The problem is compounded by returning students not taking up teaching positions to impart their skills. Orleans (1988) states:

Since the 1980s, returning scholars were not necessarily re-employed to lecture in the universities, but were assigned jobs in which they were not trained. Those who return to continue their research, found themselves with inadequate laboratory facilities, a shortage of equipment and capital for scientific research, and generally poor working conditions (pp. 62-63).

The problem is further exacerbated by large numbers of private and public sponsored Mainland Chinese students refusing to return home after completing their studies in the USA (Orleans, 1988, pp. 4-5). Li (2005) notes that of the 580,000 students who went abroad to study last year, only 160,000 returned. The combination of these factors hampers the government's determination to improve the quality of higher learning in Mainland China.

2.1.4 Minorities and education

There are 55 ethnic minority groups in the People's Republic of China (PRC) spread out across the country, but mainly in the poorest regions. They form about 8.98 per cent of the total population or 116,740,000 of the 1.3 billion people in the country. The rest of the population forms the ethnic Han group (China Development Gateway, 2006). Although minorities form a tiny fraction of the population, the education reform of Deng Xiaoping's administration has not forgotten them. Li (2005) reports: By the end of 2002, there were 73,200 primary schools and over 12,000 secondary schools and 100 colleges and universities in the ethnic autonomous regions. There were about 19.9

million students of ethnic minority students in school (pp. 273-277). There is no evidence to suggest that there is discrimination against minorities or that they are denied official sponsorship to study abroad. This is in contrast to other ethnic minorities in other countries where discrimination is more evident. The population in Indonesia, for example, is 245,452,739 with about 2.4 per cent ethnic Chinese (Johnston, 2005). Yet half of the Indonesian students in Australia are ethnic Chinese. Rao (1976, p. 174-175) noted that ethnic Chinese in Indonesia do not share the same privileges as indigenous Indonesians and are almost completely excluded from officially sponsored scholarships to study abroad. In Malaysia, too, the situation is similar. The ethnic Chinese in Malaysia form about 23.7 per cent of a population of about 24.3 million. Unlike their Malay counterparts, the majority of them support themselves when they go overseas to study, although they are not completely excluded from official sponsorship. However, one of the reasons that caused them to pursue their education overseas was the unequal opportunities accorded to them as a minority in the country (Rao, 1976, pp. 170-173).

2.1.5 Elite academics and student demand for better higher education overseas.

On 23 June, 1978, Deng Xiaoping issued an important instruction to send tens of thousands of students to study abroad (Li, 2005, p. 189). Soon after, a Chinese education delegation was sent to the USA for negotiations to send Chinese scientists and engineers to advance their studies at American universities. According to the USA official statistics, from 1978 to 1986, there were about 56,000 visas issued to visiting scholars and students from the PRC. Sixty per cent of the total was selected by Chinese institutions for official sponsorship and forty per cent of the total was privately supported by family and friends. The students were spread across the USA and across a variety of courses. In higher learning, the estimate in January 1988, shows that there were about 28,000 Mainland Chinese students enrolled in degree programs or doing research in U.S. universities (Orleans, 1988, p. 9). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) reported in their Global Education Digest in 2006 that in 2004, China had the highest absolute number of tertiary students:

19 million or about 15 per cent of the world's tertiary students. There are 2,455,250 tertiary students worldwide studying outside their own country. Mainland China contributed about 343,126. "In absolute terms, China is the largest country of origin in the world, accounting for about 14 per cent of all mobile students" (UNESCO, 2006b). The GDP in 1997 was about RMB7 billion and went up to about RMB18 billion (The US-China Business Council, 2006). RMB is an acronym for *Renminbi* or Chinese currency.

The phenomenal increase in demand for higher education in Mainland China from 1993 to 2004 is confirmed in the China Statistical Yearbook 2005. The number of enrolments in regular institutions of higher learning increased from 924,000 students in 1993 to 4,473,000 in 2004 (China statistical yearbook, 2005a). The number of enrolments for post graduate students increased from 42,145 in 1993 to 326,286 in 2004 (China statistical yearbook, 2005b). The number of post graduate students going abroad for studies increased from 10,742 in 1993 to 114,682 in 2004 (China statistical yearbook, 2005b). The statistics from UNESCO and the China statistical yearbook undoubtedly show a great demand for higher learning by Mainland Chinese students both in their own country and in institutions abroad.

2.1.6 History of Chinese migration to other parts of Asia

This section traces the historical roots of education and the powerful influence of Chinese culture. Secondly, it traces the history of Chinese migration within the Asian region. Thirdly, it uses Singapore as a platform to discuss why Chinese from other countries choose to seek higher education overseas.

The importance of education to the Chinese lie deep in Chinese culture, since the days of Confucius (孔子; K'ung-tzu). De Bary (1986) notes: "For the rise and spread of Neo-Confucianism (from the 13th century in China, the 14th century in Korea and the 17th century in Japan), it became the dominant force in education" (pp. 8-9). In Mainland China, Confucianism became the basis of the education and examination system during the Han dynasty (206-220 B.C.). According to Peterson (2002), the examinations were conducted at the county, prefectural, provincial and capital levels.

This allowed the commoner to participate in the examination on a national scale. The successful examinees were awarded a 'degree' thus separating the person from the commoner. If the examinees failed to pass the provincial or metropolitan civil examinations, the failures were doomed to become minor functionaries (Elman, 2002, p. 366).

The above clearly shows the Chinese believe success in education is closely linked to a better life. As Dimmock, (2000, p. 35) states: "This is well documented in Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan, where scholastic achievement, prized since Confucius's time and reinforced by the mandarin system, has become the obsession of most students and their parents."

There are an estimated 35 million ethnic Chinese living in the East and South East Asian region. Their population numbers are located in Table 1. Many of these ethnic Chinese are descendants of migrants who sailed or travelled around the region for centuries. The most famous of these was Admiral Cheng Ho's first expedition to *Nanyang* or the South Seas around the early 15th century. As Chang (2003) states: "During the nineteenth century, millions of Chinese moved abroad to southeast Asia, the West Indies, the Philippines, New Zealand, Australia, Africa, and the Americas" (p. 17). In Singapore alone, there were 649,000 migrants who arrived from Mainland China between 1907 and 1911 (Han, Fernandez & Tan, 1998, p. 23). These migrants carried with them a culture that is deeply influenced by Confucian teaching and ethics. The importance of education to the migrants was immense. The following Table 1 provides a glimpse of where the ethnic Chinese have settled and the numbers that have grown since their ancestors landed in these adopted countries.

Table 1

Population of ethnic Chinese in East and South East Asian countries.

Country	Population	Ethnic Chinese population in numbers (Estimated)	Official or Common languages
Singapore	4,492,150	3,449,971	English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil
Malaysia	24,385,858	5,779,448	Bahasa Melayu
Thailand	64,631,595	9,048,423	Thai
Indonesia	245,452,739	*6,000,000	Bahasa Indonesia
Hongkong	6,940,432	6,593,410	Cantonese and English
Philippines	89,468,677	**1,500,000	Tagalog
Macau	453,125	433,640	Cantonese
Japan	127,463,611	244,241	Japanese
South Korea	48,846,823	20,000	Korean
Vietnam	84,402,966	928,432	Vietnamese
Brunei	379,444	56,916	Malay
Burma (Myanmar)	47,382,633	1,421,478	Burmese
Laos	6,368,481	63,684	Lao
Cambodia (Kampuchea)	13,881,427	138,814	Khmer
	TOTAL:	35,678,457	

Source:

*Chinese population in Indonesia by Johnston (2005).

**Chinese population in Philippines by Wikipedia (2006a).

Note: All other statistics are provided by The World Factbook (2006).

While the migrants contributed to the cultures of their adopted countries, they did not forget their culture of origin, especially in education terms. This was evident in Malaysia and Singapore, where ethnic Chinese banded together to build schools to

cater for their own ethnic group. One such school in Singapore was built in 1920 named Hong Wen School, which is currently located in a new building along Victoria Street (Hong Wen School, 2006). In 1955 the ethnic Chinese led Singaporeans from all walks of life to set up the first Chinese-language University, Nanyang University (Nantah) in Southeast Asia at the Western part of Singapore. Today, the university is popularly known as the Nanyang Technological University (NTU). It was ranked 48th amongst the world's top 50 universities by The Times Higher Education Supplement (Davie & Neo, 2005). This was complemented by National University of Singapore (NUS), which was ranked 22nd amongst the world's top 50 universities; 9th in Engineering and I.T; 15th in biomedical sciences and 13th in social science (Davie & Neo, 2005). Why then do Singaporeans of all three races still seek higher education overseas? The reasons rest with: (1) limited number of places and (2) desire for better education.

The limited number of places is an inevitable problem when the success rate of pre-university students is high. Due to constraints of space for this thesis, this section will use the examples of ethnic Chinese in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia for discussion.

In Singapore there were about 26,915 potential students who qualified for universities either locally or overseas. However, the intake of NUS, NTU and its affiliates the National Institute of Education (NIE) for the same year was only 13,381 (Ministry of Education, 2004). As the two universities are keen to maintain their world-class standards, it is inevitable that only those who meet their stringent requirements are accepted into the universities. Assuming that all the potential students qualified for the universities, there would be about 13,534 who would have to find other alternatives due to limited places. While the majority of these students eventually join the workforce, there are some who would pursue foreign university degrees either locally or overseas. Those who are more affluent will be more likely to pursue their education overseas. As Rao (1976, p. 189) states: "... students from Singapore come essentially from the urban middle class." Singaporean students can be found in USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and other European countries.

The second most common reasons for ethnic Chinese to venture overseas is in pursuit of quality or better education, especially in English speaking Western countries.

In Australia, Rao (1976, pp. 170-190) found that the majority of Singaporean students in the country are ethnic Chinese. The Singaporean ethnic Chinese and their ethnic Chinese counterparts from Malaysia and Indonesia offer similar feelings that the reasons for pursuing their education overseas, especially in Australia were “to see the world, superior and wider educational and training facilities.”

Even today, ethnic Chinese scholars outside Mainland China, may pursue the best education overseas for reasons that may differ from their counterparts in imperial China, but the fact remains that it does serve them well in the high political office they held or hold today. This is substantiated by the list of some very prominent ethnic Chinese politicians in the region, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Politicians in South East Asia of ethnic Chinese origin

Name	Country	Status	Qualification	Awarded By
Lee Hsien Loong	Singapore	Minister of Finance (2001 - Prime Minister (2004 -	First Class Honours in Mathematics and a Diploma in Computer Science (with distinction). Masters in Public Administration (MPA)	Cambridge University Harvard University
Lee Kuan Yew	Singapore	Prime Minister (1959 – 1990) Senior Minister (1991 – 2004) Minister Mentor (2004 -	First Class honours in Law with a star for distinction in the final examinations.	Fitzwilliam, Cambridge, England.
Lim Chong Eu	Malaysia	Chief Minister of Penang (1969 to 1990)	Degree in Medicine	Edinburgh University
Mari Elka Pangestu	Indonesia	Minister of Trade	Bachelor and Master's degrees Doctorate in economics	Australian National University University of California at Davis, USA
María Corazón Sumulong Cojuangco Aquino	Philippines	President (1986-1992)	Degree in French	College of Mount Saint Vincent, USA.
Thaksin Shinawatra	Thailand	Prime Minister (2001 -	Graduate Master's degree in criminal justice Doctorate in criminal justice	Police Cadet Academy in Thailand Eastern Kentucky University, USA Sam Houston State University, Texas, USA.

Sources in order of the names above:

Lee Hsien Loong: Singapore Government (2006a)

Lee Kuan Yew: Singapore Government (2006b)

Lim Chong Eu: Wikipedia (2006b)

Mari Elka Pagestu: Wikipedia (2006c)

María Corazón Sumulong Cojuangco Aquino: Wikipedia (2006d)

In summary, the literature review traces the events that led to Mainland Chinese students seeking education abroad. The political history of Mainland China, since 1949 shows quite clearly that the education institutions went through very difficult times during the political transition of the country. The education reforms apparently did not contribute to the well-being of the country. It was again Deng who brought the country back on track, when the Tiananmen incident threatened to send it back to self-imposed isolation. The 'second' opening-up of the country in 1992 to the international community turned around the 'wheel of fortune' in Mainland China and led the economy to grow at a phenomenal speed. This created increasing demand for a skilled educated labour force, which in turn led to a phenomenal demand for education in the country fuelled by the population boom. The review covers how the education reforms affected the ethnic minorities in the country in comparison with other minorities in other countries, especially in South East Asia, where ethnic Chinese had migrated in large numbers. Economic growth has also produced an increasing number of elite academics and students who in turn translate into higher demand for better higher education overseas. The phenomenon of Mainland Chinese seeking higher learning in large numbers was compared with other ethnic Chinese in the East Asia and South East Asia region. Perhaps all answers lead to culture. As Dimmock, (2000) states: "...scholastic achievement, prized since Confucius's time and reinforced by the mandarin system, has become the obsession of most students and their parents" (p. 35). This includes both Mainland Chinese and ethnic Chinese around the world.

2.2 How do Mainland Chinese university students manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment?

The findings in this study have shown that the participants did encounter some unforeseen problems when they arrived in Singapore. The key problems were: (1) Language difficulty; (2) Transition difficulty from teacher-centred learning to student-

centred learning; (3) Living conditions and (4) Cultural shock. This section therefore reviews literature relating to themes of acclimatisation considerations to local language colloquialism, new teaching and learning methods, new living environment, and new social and cultural environment. In order to understand the issue on a wider scope, literature relating to other international students will also be covered whenever necessary.

2.2.1 Acclimatisation to the host language and colloquial language

The issue of colloquial language and its understanding is a worldwide phenomenon involving students of diverse nationalities in the host countries. In Singapore, a study by Zhang (2001) on Mainland Chinese students studying at the two local tertiary institutions shows that their major difficulties were speaking and writing in English. The participants in this study are students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels from Mainland China doing their higher learning in Singapore. They were classified as SM2 and SM3 students. SM is an acronym for ‘senior middle’ school in Mainland China. SM2 students are those who had completed the 2nd year of their high school in Mainland China. SM3 students are freshmen in the universities in Mainland China. The findings by Zhang (2001) come as no surprise because as Feng (2003) explains, since the revision of the College English Syllabus (CES) for high school students in Mainland China, the focus remains very much textbook based teaching rather than a more practical oral approach.

The problem is further aggravated by the way English is taught in Mainland China. Some of Zhang’s participants report that their teacher taught them the English language using the Chinese language. The whole method of English language teaching was based on ‘explanation of language or grammatical points with the help of the glossary at the end of each text’. The purpose is to help the students to pass the examination rather than apply or use the language. As one of his participants relates: “teachers themselves did not speak English in class either because their English was limited or because they preferred the method to help students achieve higher marks in the examination.” Feng (2003) had noted that teachers themselves were not in favour of

a 'communicative approach' to teaching English language in the 'belief that the communicative methodology is not realistic for the Chinese classroom'. Although, English teaching in major cities like Shanghai, Shijiazhuang, Nanjing and Jinan may focus more on 'communicative' skills, the lack of an English-speaking environment meant that teachers could not practise their oral English either.

The literature implies that the students' shortcomings in English language proficiency in Singapore appear to have its origin from their classrooms in Mainland China. As Zhang (2001) has noted, his participants' lack of proficiency in the English language is the main contributor to the participants' anxiety. In helping the students to acclimatise, both SM2 and SM3 students were given six months of intensive English language training in Singapore before they embark on their university programmes. However, SM3 participants were unsure whether their six months of English language training was sufficient for them to cope with the requirement of the degree programmes. However, SM2 participants were less concerned because they still have further training in one of the junior colleges to mingle with local students thus giving them more time to get themselves acquainted with the 'standard curricula' (Zhang, 2001).

Similar problems of international students facing English language problems in the U.K. were also discussed by Elsey & Kinnel (1990, p. 2) and Taylor (1987, p. 166-174). In Australia, Rao (1976) listed English language as a common problem involving international students. Orleans (1988, pp. 24-25) noted that most visiting scholars who went to the USA in 1979 and the early 1980s had serious language deficiencies and had to be enrolled in language training courses. The problems in the USA were resolved by the USA government insisting that the Chinese government administer stringent language proficiency tests and only allowing those who qualified into the USA.

While the literature suggests ways to improve the teaching of English language to the foreign students in their own countries, there appears to be a lack of information on how the students cope with their difficulties when they actually arrive in their host countries. Although Singapore and USA provide help to these students by sending them for English language training before they embark on their actual courses, the same studies suggest that such experiences have little effect on alleviating the students' anxiety (Orleans 1988).

The present study however, will show that many of the participants actually cope with the problem through sheer willpower. Many simply spend long hours reading up on their own to catch up with whatever they could not understand during the lectures. In the U.K., overseas students were observed to cling to textbooks because there they found none of the colloquialisms that caused difficulties when listening to lecturers and engaging in discussion (Elsey & Kinnel, 1990, p. 2). There is no definitive way to know whether these foreign students in their respective host countries actually succeed in their pursuit of quality education or whether all go home with the qualification sought.

2.2.2 *Acclimatisation to new teaching and learning methods.*

The participants in Zhang's (2001) research lamented that they were lost as to what to do because teachers in Singapore did not give them clear directions. They also lamented that "they were not equipped with the necessary self-autonomy that is required for studying in overseas institutions." They were also intimidated by the number of books they have to deal with for every skill area that they have to master. According to the study by Zhang (1995), it is true that Mainland Chinese students showed a preference for the teacher providing all the information rather than the student themselves seeking out what they need to learn. Meyer (2003) found that contrary to popular belief, 85 per cent of the Mainland Chinese participants show that 'they expect the teacher to guide them in gaining knowledge themselves rather than just provide them with the knowledge (spoon-feed them)'. The interesting differences in the literature quite clearly suggest that more study needs to be done. It is interesting to note here that while the study of Zhang (2001) and Meyer (2003) were based on Mainland Chinese university students studying in the two universities in Singapore, both appear to draw different conclusions. Nevertheless, this study seems to concur with Zhang (2001) that Mainland Chinese university students studying in Singapore prefer the teacher-centred learning method to the student-centred learning type.

Elsey & Kinnel (1990, pp. 2-3) found that many foreign students in the U.K. felt that 'they lack direction from their tutors and did not welcome having scope for

planning self-study programmes'. In addition, they did not respond easily to discussion methods when being taught. Elsey & Kinnel (1990) noted that generally the overseas students had problems with the U.K. system, *inter-alia*, concerning academic matters. Channell (1990), citing a science lecturer in U.K. claimed: "Overseas students' expectations of supervisors are different – they expect their supervisor to be their total helper and adviser." Elsey (1990) noted that "very few overseas students claimed previous experiences of the discussion-based approach, even amongst those from European countries." The problems encountered by international students relating to different teaching and learning methods appears to affect different nationalities to varying degrees. This is quite clearly shown in the study by Rao (1976, pp. 160-169). However, the experience can be quite harrowing for some. As Taylor (1987, p. 271) argues, the contrast in "teaching methods, school organisation and discipline" could be a very unpleasant experience, as shown by the Chinese students in her study in the U.K. As Dimmock (2000, p. 154) cautioned, "there is a danger of underestimating the importance of societal culture when ideas, policies and practices are transplanted from one system to another" (See Appendix 'I' for a discussion on the problematic nature of defining culture).

It is again worthy of note that while much of the literature shows the difficulties of international students in adjusting to their new education environment, there is little research or information to show how the students in the host countries actually cope with their predicaments and problems of adaptation.

2.2.3 *Acclimatisation to a new living environment.*

The venture of international students into a foreign land for the first time is often fraught with uncertainty, anxiety and unforeseen difficulties. Such feelings were documented from as early as the nineteenth century (Lewins, 1990). Studies by Livingstone (1960) in the late 1950s and by Lewins (1990) in the mid 1980s show that the living needs relating to accommodation were not adequately addressed. The literature available is based on studies that took place more than a decade ago.

Nevertheless, the findings may provide a glimpse of the changing times relating to the topic.

Livingstone (1960) found that there was a lack of understanding in regards to the needs of international students from a different geographical area. One example was that the accommodation in the U.K. did not sufficiently take into account how international students from tropical countries such as Africa and Asia feel extreme cold, which can then bring on “quite definite physical suffering” (Livingstone, 1960, p. 5). The study by Lewins (1990) suggests that living conditions in the mid 1980s were better, but other problems relating to accommodation continue to persist. These are mostly due to lack of service in providing information for the students to prepare themselves for the new living environment in Britain. This causes anxieties for the newly arriving students. Some students were critical of the ‘lack of welcome on their arrival, and felt this to be a serious shortcoming, given the problem of culture shock which is experienced in the first crucial weeks of their stay’ (Lewins, 1990). It was further reported that “mature students also had difficulty in acclimatising to hall life because they could find it noisy and disturbing” (Lewins, 1990). Some overseas students may find the food in the host countries unpalatable or too rich for their native or health conscious habits. The cost of living in Britain was also a cause for concern for many overseas students because of the wide difference in the exchange rates.

The grievances of overseas students are not always based on the lack of service or poor facilities; it could also be different level of expectations. Especially for paying students, the level of expectations may be very high (Elsey & Kinnel, 1990).

2.2.4 Acclimatisation to new social and cultural environment.

The social reality that international students face, namely, culture shock and prejudice of one kind or another, is a problem highlighted in several studies undertaken in the 1960s (Elsey & Kinnel, 1990, p. 1).

The international students’ adaptation to a new social and cultural environment in the host country where they pursue their education is another delicate issue that they have to contend with. The barrier of language often leads to either self-

isolation or anxiety in dealing with others with different cultural backgrounds. In regard to students of Chinese origin, social behaviour is often dictated by their culture that has evolved since the days of Confucius. According to Tong (1970), 'harmony' sums up a big part of Confucian teaching which includes filial piety, friendship, getting along well - [sic], self-discipline, responsibility and charity. The chronological importance of these harmonious relationships begins with the family, kinship, friends and then society in general. This explains the observation of Cheung (1975), that Chinese students in Britain tend to confine their social activities towards their immediate family and there is very little social interaction with the wider Chinese community. In a slight twist to historical facts on Confucian teaching, O'Neill (1972) discovered that the Chinese regard their 'kin' relationship outside the nuclear family unit as of less importance compared to some of their friends. In relationship with friends this is again differentiated between inner group and outer group. As Leung (1996) states: "Chinese tend to believe that out-group members are less likely to be dependable and trustworthy than are members of the in-group." Gao (1991) explains: "You need to be an intimate friend before a Chinese will open up and tell you embedded stories." Similarly, Singapore's former minister of state for trade & industry and education, who also led a group of members-of-parliament in looking after the Chinese affairs in Singapore, states: "You have to gain the trust of the community first. The Chinese community do not want to share their problems with you unless they trust you" (Leong, 2006). Gabrenya & Kwang (1996) define relationships in Chinese culture in three categories. The first category relates to 'expressive ties' involving 'close family members'. The second category relates to 'mixed ties', such as those with 'friends and other kin' and the third category relates to instrumental ties, as those with strangers or out-group members with whom there is no lasting relationship. All these different level of 'ties' are made even more complicated by the important, but intangible concepts of Chinese social interaction relating to *mianzi* (面子; face), *renqing* (人情; favour) and *guanxi* (关系; interpersonal relationship). The complexities of Chinese social culture could be a major factor that inhibits Mainland Chinese or Chinese of other nationalities in their attempt to socialise.

The evolution of Chinese culture is perhaps as painful as the transition of the country's system from one to another (See Appendix 'I' for a discussion on the problematic nature of defining culture). During the GPCR, young school children were taught that 'Father is dear, Mother is dear, but Chairman Mao [Máo] is dearest of all'. In addition, adults were made to confess any mistakes they had made (Williams, 1985, p. 25). This perhaps turns Máo into a cult figure that even parents became secondary to the children. There are no statistics to show how many friends, relatives or family members reported one another to the authorities in such social frenzy. Perhaps the most significant episode of such an incident was a case involving the former defence minister, Lín Biāo (Lín; 林彪). According to the revelation by Lín's personal physician, it was Lín's own daughter who inadvertently exposed her father in an assassination plot to kill Máo (Wikipedia, 2006f). While there were many accounts of how Lín eventually died there was no literature to challenge the physician's account. A story like this must have struck fear in every individual and turned the meaning of trust to one that has no meaning. Such was the social environment that the parents of the present generation in Mainland China grew up in. It is therefore no surprise that trust among Chinese people is treated with great caution. Although Hofstede (1980) and other studies have shown the Chinese to be a collective society; recent studies have shown this trend may be changing. Meyer (2003) in her study shows that many of her Mainland Chinese participants tend to be more individualistic than collective. Meyer implied that this could be attributed to their competitive nature of the education system in China.

2.3 Conclusion

The first part of the literature review reveals some of the possible factors that cause Mainland Chinese students to seek education overseas. It traces the events from the time Mainland China became a republic in 1949 to the present. It also covers the country's societal culture, the demography and how the vibrant economic growth fuels demand for better skilled and better educated labour.

The second part of the review on Mainland Chinese students studying overseas was hampered by lack of literature in part due to the lack of studies during Máo's era

from 1949 to 1976. This literature review therefore widens its coverage to include other international students studying outside their own country. This part of the review mainly focuses on how international students cope with their new challenges relating to adaptation to language and new environment relating to teaching and learning, living, social and cultural environment. However the focus shifted to the Mainland Chinese or the Chinese of other nationalities, whenever such studies were available. In all, the available literature clearly shows that international students face many challenges in their quest for quality education in the host countries. However, as mentioned earlier, very little else is known about how they cope with their many challenges, except that they seem to put in more effort in their 'self-study' to overcome their problems during lessons. Those who could not acclimatise themselves to the new social and cultural environment mostly go into self-isolation and remain aloof from other students.

This study therefore hopes to contribute to theory on the phenomenon of Mainland Chinese students studying overseas with specific focus on university students and their cultural acclimatisation. As Walker & Dimmock (1999, pp. 321-348) explain: "societal culture has not been rigorously applied to the field of educational leadership and administration, or as a means for comparing the organisation of individual schools. Neither has school-level culture been developed as a foundation for comparative analysis..." This view is reinforced by Cheng (1995) who argues that: "the cultural element is not only necessary, but essential in the study of educational administration" (p. 99).

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The methodology of this thesis centres on grounded theory and is located in the Interpretivist paradigm. This study also adopts a symbolic interactionist perspective.

The chapter is structured into the following main Sections:

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 The paradigms of Positivism and Interpretivism
- 3.2 Justification for using the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approaches
- 3.3 Grounded theory method(s)
- 3.4 Context – Universities in Singapore
- 3.5 Methods of data collection.
- 3.6 Data analysis
- 3.7 Trustworthiness of the grounded theory of Selective Pragmatism
- 3.8 Ethics
- 3.9 Conclusion

3.1 The Paradigms Of Positivism And Interpretivism

Positivism and Interpretivism are almost synonymous with Quantitative and Qualitative approaches to research, respectively. However, it is quite feasible for qualitative studies to use numbers and even statistics in the presentation of data.

Likewise, the use of quantitative methods does not preclude the presentation of data in a narrative form. The choice of paradigm, approach and research method is determined by the aims of the research and the research question.

According to Gall, Gall & Borg (1999, p. 13): “Positivists believe that there is a real world out there that can be subjected to scientific study similar to those in physical science.” Researchers of this persuasion believe that reality can be made known objectively through study using numerical variables, the results of which can be quantified and thus generated time and again (Gall et al., 1999). An example of such data gathering is via prepared questionnaires, which can be administered in great numbers to generalise across a target population through random sampling. The design of the questionnaire often has a list of pre-printed questions followed by choices of pre-printed answers; each is assigned a score on a scale, which requires the participants to tick their choice accordingly. This can be known as a *Likert* scale. The quantitative researcher would then convert the given answers into a particular number of variables. The purpose of using questionnaires is to ensure that the researcher remains ‘separated’ from the object of inquiry, thus giving the impression that the research is not biased by any close interaction with the participants. This is commonly known as the *etic* (outsider) theory (Gall et al., 1999, p. 293).

The interpretivist, on the other hand, “believes that aspects of social reality have no existence apart from the meanings that individuals construct for them” (Gall et al., 1999, p.14). Unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers are more interested in studying single individuals or situations, each of which is called a *case*, and they may be able to generalise case findings mainly by comparing the case with other cases that also have been studied in depth (Gall et al., 1999, p. 14). This often requires the qualitative researcher to interact closely with their object of inquiry, usually through interviews. This allows the researcher to play a very constructive role during the investigation, which follows the *emic* (insider) theory (Gall et al., 1999, p. 293).

The need to gather in-depth data from Mainland students in Singapore about their experiences and motives for studying there - made it appropriate to adopt an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative, as opposed to a quantitative, approach.

3.2 Justification For Using The Interpretivist Paradigm And Qualitative Approaches

Symbolic Interactionism rests on the foundation that individuals make sense of their world through interaction and sharing experiences and meanings. Grounded theory and qualitative research methods are based on collecting and analysing data that captures these shared experiences and meanings. Grounded theory is sometimes referred to as the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 101-116).

Since the topic of this study is related to student educational choices within different societies and cultures, the researcher is required to be in direct contact with the participants and to use qualitative methods of data collection, such as interviews, documentary study and observation.

In education, the qualitative approach is sometimes referred to as the naturalistic approach. Lincoln and Guba (1985) prefer the use of the naturalist approach for a study that perceives realities as multiple, constructed, and holistic instead of the positivist's single, real and impersonal approach. Further justification for using the qualitative approach in this study is supported by Bogdan & Biklen (2003) who explain:

People act, not on the basis of predetermined responses to predefined objects, but rather as interpreters, definers, signallers, and symbol and signal readers whose behaviour can only be understood by having the researcher enter into the defining process through such methods as participant observation (p. 25).

The advantages of naturalistic study are manifold. As in ethnographic research, the need to understand another culture entails that the researcher gets close to the source and the people who knowingly or unknowingly create those cultures. While the researcher may observe certain cultural phenomena and take note of what is observed, it is through direct conversations with the people being studied that a holistic view of the phenomenon may be gained. The data collected using the qualitative approach is useful for uncovering the *emic* (insider view) of the individual, group, society or cultures (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The immersion of the researcher into the realm of the participants also helps to create an atmosphere of trust. This encourages them to ‘open up’ to the researcher so that he or she can gain a better understanding of them and to uncover what could or could not be seen during the observation process. This will provide a ‘thick description’ of the study that enables readers to feel as though they are really part of the ‘actors’ in the research (Gall et al., 1999, p. 331). Qualitative researchers, therefore, according to Denzin & Lincoln (1994) “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p.2).

3.2.1 The research question and Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism, which has its origin from Mead (1934), is commonly associated with qualitative research. Gall et al. (1999) list it as one of the seventeen research traditions designed to investigate phenomena of society and culture (p. 309). Blumer (1969) suggests that human experience is mediated by interpretation and that Symbolic Interactionism rest on three premises:

- First: people act toward things or fellow humans in their surroundings on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them.
- Second: these meanings come from communicating or interacting with people.
- Third: these meanings are managed through an interpretive process used by the person with the things he comes across according to the situation the person is in (p. 2).

Based on the above definition, the two main research questions: (1) Why do university students from Mainland China choose to study in Singapore? (as opposed to elsewhere) and (2) How do Mainland Chinese university students manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment? can be further broken down into the following research questions:

- 1) Does the education environment in China prompt them to seek education overseas?
- 2) Are there distinct differences faced by students in higher education in the education systems of China and Singapore? If so, what are they?
- 3) What are the key factors in their decision to study in Singapore? (e.g. cost, social security, quality education and language)
- 4) How do students manage their study in university?
- 5) In their desire to excel in the new Singapore environment, how do they manage their studies after their normal university hours?
- 6) How do the students cope with a new living environment far away from home?

The research and interview questions assume the importance of an interaction process (Denzin, 1971, p. 168). Blumer's first premise of people acting towards things that give meaning to them is important to this study of Mainland Chinese university students in Singapore. The participants act towards the things or people around them according to the meanings each of these things have for them. In this case, the environment of Mainland China provides meanings to which the participants react. The meanings in this respect may vary from participant to participant.

The second principle of Blumer's (1969) theory of Symbolic Interactionism states that meanings are drawn from social interaction. The actions of others (dynamically) create meanings for the participants. These interpretations can best be understood by the researcher studying them in-depth (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

The third premise of Blumer's (1969) theory on Symbolic Interactionism concerns the formation of meanings and how they change. This follows an interpretive

process used by, in this case, the participants according to the things they encounter. This process is an indispensable component of social life. Individuals adjust their behaviour according to the behaviour of others (Chalmers, 1998, p. 87).

All three premises of Symbolic Interactionism, as suggested by Blumer (1969) are interlinked. As this study shows, how the participants interpret and give meaning to the objects and the people around them, how the given meanings change according to the changing circumstances, and what all this means can only be understood when another person (in this case the researcher), interacts closely with the participants.

3.3 Grounded Theory Method(s)

The word ‘method’ is often loosely used with grounded theory. Strauss (1987) argues that grounded theory is not so much a specific method as a *style* of doing qualitative analysis that includes theoretical sampling, constant comparisons of data, and the use of a coding paradigm in order to ensure the development of conceptual density. Strauss & Corbin (1990) explain that the procedures of grounded theory are designed systematically and carefully to build theory (p. 26).

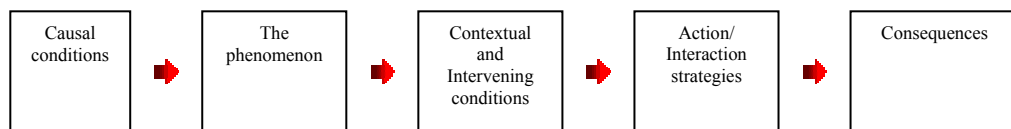
Strauss & Corbin (1990) also define grounded theory as: “one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents” (p. 23). That is, grounded theory does not set out to prove an existing theory, but rather, begins with an area of study and allows what is relevant to *emerge* from the data. This is in contrast to *a priori* theory, which follows the principle of given that something is true, we can assume something else. Lincoln & Guba (1985) argue that grounded theory researchers prefer that substantive theory emerges from the data because *a priori* theory could not possibly include the multiple realities that are likely to be encountered. For instance, it was discovered during the pilot interviews that participants from different socio-economic backgrounds hold different perceptions of studying and living in Singapore. It is therefore almost impossible to make broad generalisations based on what a particular group of participants’ experiences.

An in-depth study of participants through direct interaction has several advantages. Firstly, this process helps to establish the *causal conditions* or the reasons

that create the *phenomenon*. The use of grounded theory, therefore, enables the researcher to identify many of the unknown components that influence the formation of the phenomena under study. The process of producing dense data enables the development of theory which can then be used to investigate other situations, making grounded theory applicable to a wide variety of contexts related to that phenomenon, “... provided that the data are comprehensive and the interpretations are conceptual and broad” (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p.23).

Secondly, these methods enable the linking of sequences of action/interaction as they respond to a phenomenon, leading to certain outcomes or consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 106). In this study, it shows how the education environment in Mainland China creates a compulsion (*Causal condition*) for some university students to seek education in Singapore (*Phenomenon*). It also shows how their decision affects them in Singapore (*Outcomes*). The axial coding paradigm suggested by Strauss & Corbin (1990) is illustrated as follows:

Figure 1 – Action/Interaction process
(An Axial Coding Paradigm suggested by Strauss & Corbin, 1990)



The third justification for using grounded theory methods in this study is the linking of the multiple theories that emerge during data analysis. The need to consider all factors -- concepts, categories, properties and or consequences – helps ensure that the whole process of investigation is as comprehensive as possible before the final theory emerges. In short, the analysis of the data enables the process of developing a pattern of relationships for a theory to emerge (Glaser, 1992).

Three key features of the qualitative approach adopted in this study were:

- a) The participants and sampling methods
- b) Data collection
- c) Data analysis

3.3.1 The participants and sampling methods

There is no simple advice on how to plan the ‘right’ sample size for a grounded theory study (Ingham, Vanwesenbeeck & Kirkland, 2000). However, the research is guided by the principles of internal consistency and coherence across the study’s components, including its sampling and data saturation. Since little was known about the participants apart from the fact that they were Mainland Chinese university students, the researcher chose to be flexible about initial sampling choices in order to gather the most relevant data about the phenomenon under investigation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 181). A group of 20 Mainland Chinese university students studying in the two main universities in Singapore were targeted. There were two replacements after the first interview due to drop-outs. This brought the total number of participants interviewed to 22. The sampling comprised of 8 (plus 1 replacement) postgraduate students from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and 12 (plus 1 replacement) undergraduate students from Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

Each of the participants is given a code name to protect their identity. A full description of the participants’ identification system can be found in Chapter 5, Section 5.1. The participants’ profile is located in Appendix ‘F’.

Since the researcher’s experience over the last decade has shown that there is great diversity of socio-economic status and cultures across China, a maximum variation sample was sought. The researcher’s rich experiences of travel in China helped complement the theoretical context of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42). It was deemed that the number of respondents required to provide socio-economic diversity was about 20, and this was considered a sufficiently large number for the researcher to manage. The respondents came from many different parts of China: (1) Anyang, Henan Province; (2) Anshan, Liaoning Province; (3) Shan Xi Province; (4) Zhejiang, Jiangsu Province; (5) Nanjing, Jiangsu Province; (6) Suzhou, Jiangsu

Province; (7) Chengdu, Sichuan Province; (8) Chongqing City; (9) Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province; (10) Beijing, (Capital) Hebei Province; (11) Tianjin, Hebei Province; (12) Qingdao, Shandong Province; (13) Wuhan, Hubei Province and (14) Jingzhou, Hubei Province.

3.3.2 *Theoretical sampling*

During the progression of the study, theoretical sampling was adopted because sampling and data collection and analysis go in tandem (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 178). Theoretical sampling is defined as sampling on the basis of concepts that have proven of theoretical relevance to the evolving theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 176). Janesick (1994) defines it as: "...a non-probability sampling, in which the objective of developing theory guides the process of sampling and data collection. This allows the researcher to analyse the initial data and then decide how to proceed from there. Glaser (1978) describes the process as one in which:

... the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. The process of data collection is controlled by theoretical sampling according to the emerging theory (p. 101).

It was after the first interviews, coupled with observation and document study, that the research was able to focus on specific participants and to look for others when the opportunity arose. The sampling was later switched to discriminate sampling.

3.3.3 *Discriminate sampling*

The purpose of discriminate sampling is to fill out poorly developed categories, strengthening the linkage of the various categories and ensuring maximum authenticity of the story line (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 176).

After the first interviews, it became clear that the participants belonged to three categories of sponsorships. Those who were fully-sponsored by their respective universities in Singapore enjoyed monthly allowances, free lodgings and fully-paid course fees. Those in the partially-sponsored category enjoyed a tuition-grant of up to 80% of their course fee, but were not given any monthly allowance or free lodgings from their universities in Singapore. Self-sponsored participants had to pay their course fees in full and did not enjoy any privileges. The participants' profile is located in Appendix 'F'.

We will now consider the three major tertiary institutions in Singapore.

3.4 Context – Universities In Singapore

The research on Mainland Chinese University students' perceptions of studying in Singapore was carried out in the context of Singapore's main universities. These are: (1) National University of Singapore (NUS); (2) Nanyang Technological University (NTU); and (3) National Institute of Education (part of NTU).

Brief details of the three tertiary institutions, mentioned above, are as follows:

3.4.1 *National University of Singapore*

National University of Singapore (NUS) is known to be one of the finest universities in the Asia-Pacific region. It offers a wide range of courses through 11 faculties, such as: Medicine, Law, Engineering and a host of Information Technology related programmes. The university enjoys a close teaching-research nexus with 13 national-level, 10 university-level and more than 60 faculty-based research institutes and centres. As of September, 2004, its impressive range of programmes attracted an enrolment of 22,751 undergraduates and 8,595 graduate students both locally and internationally. As of August 2004, the university was staffed by 2,055 faculty members, 1,151 research staff and 856 administrative and professional staff (National University of Singapore, 2005). The university was recently ranked 22nd among the

world's top 50 universities by *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 9th in Engineering and I.T; 15th in biomedical sciences and 13th in the social sciences (Davie & Neo, 2005).

3.4.2 *Nanyang Technological University*

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) sits on a 200-hectare site in the South-Western part of Singapore, surrounded by beautiful lush vegetation. It offers a wide range of courses through their various faculties, such as Engineering (Computer, Materials, Civil & Environment, Electrical & Electronics and Mechanical & Production), Communication Studies, Biological Sciences, Accountancy and Business. These courses attract an enrolment of 15,764 undergraduate students and 7,054 postgraduate students doing either research, higher degree by coursework and dissertation or postgraduate diploma.

The staff as of 25 July 2004 comprised 1,361 academics (including visiting appointments), 652 research staff and 413 administrative & professional staff (Nanyang Technological University, 2005).

The Economic Intelligence Unit, a member of the Economist Group rankings, reports that NTU's MBA students are the top in South East Asia and also amongst the world's best (Yadav, 2004). In the world university rankings by *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, the university was ranked 48th amongst the world's top 50 universities (Davie & Neo, 2005).

3.4.3 *National Institute of Education (Part of NTU)*

The National Institute of Education (NIE) sits on a SGD400 million campus within the 200-hectare grounds of NTU, part of which is NIE. It is the sole teacher-training institute in Singapore, fully equipped with state-of-the-art equipment for teaching, learning and research. NIE offers a wide range of diploma, degree, masters

and Ph.D. programmes in education and has attracted an enrolment of 12,964 with 5,374 full time equivalent students, as of January 2004 (National Institute of Education, 2005).

3.5 Methods Of Data Collection

Two methods of data collection were used: face-to-face interviews, (recorded on video tapes with audio tapes as a backup) and then document study and informal meetings to clarify ambiguities noted during interviews and data analysis. Documents were also submitted by the participants. The multiple sources of data collection were necessary for triangulation, which also helped to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. The whole data collection exercise lasted 16 months.

3.5.1 *Pilot interviews*

Three rounds of pilot interviews were conducted with 3 different participants. The first was conducted on 6 December 2003. All three pilot interviews were conducted for the purpose of testing and refining the amended specific research questions and interview questions. Specific research questions for the first interview are included as Figure 2 and the accompanying set of interview questions are located in Appendix 'A'.

Figure 2

First pilot -- specific interview questions

1. What are education conditions like in Mainland China today?
2. What causes Mainland Chinese university students to seek further education overseas?
3. What attracts Mainland Chinese university students to study in Singapore?
4. Why do Mainland Chinese university students go to other countries other than Singapore?
5. What are the problems encountered by Mainland Chinese university students in Singapore?
6. How do they solve the problems encountered?
7. What is their overall opinion of their educational experience in Singapore?
8. What are their plans after they graduate from Singapore?

The third pilot interview led to the final set of specific research questions being formulated and refined, as below in Figure 3:

Figure 3
Specific Research Question for the first data collection exercise

1. Does the education environment in China prompt them to seek education overseas?
2. Are there distinct differences for students in higher education in the education systems of China and Singapore? If so, what are they?
3. In deciding to further their education in Singapore, what are the key factors in their decision-making? (E.g. cost, social security, quality education and language)
4. In their quest for quality education in Singapore, how do students manage their study in university?
5. In their desire to cope with their studies in the new Singapore environment, how do they manage their studies after normal university hours?
6. In a new living environment, how are the students able to cope with their daily lives while being far away from home?

The pilot interviews provided the researcher with rich insights into what to expect in the main study. This was an invaluable experience, especially for a new researcher heading towards a study based on grounded theory without a definite direction. The trial interview allowed the researcher to fine-tune the specific research questions and interview questions, resulting in the elimination of many unnecessary questions. The final set of interview questions for the first data collection exercise is located in Appendix 'B'. This again evolved into a second set of interview questions, located in Appendix 'C', that were used in the second data collection exercise. A

sizeable reduction in the questions helped the researcher to better focus on the objectives of the research.

3.5.2 *Interviews*

Two semi-structured rounds of interviews were conducted over a period of about 8 months beginning 16 October 2004, although the whole data collection exercise lasted 16 months due to follow-up meetings and the collection and study of documents. Attempts to bring the participants together for a group interview were aborted after observation and consultation with some participants found that this was not feasible, due to some participants' discomfort at being interviewed in front of their peers.

In using semi-structured interviews, it was found that the task of achieving theoretical sampling was made easier. This type of data collection is a form of non-probability sampling, in which the objective of developing theory guides the process of sampling and data collection. This allows the researcher to analyse the initial data and then decide how to proceed from there in future data collection (Janesick, 1994).

The interview schedule used was more a general plan that enabled the researcher to decide on the spot what questions and comments to use in order to lead the interviewee toward the interviewer's objectives (Gall et al., 1999, p. 132). The first and second interview exercise was carried out with its own set of interview questions shown in Appendix 'B' and Appendix 'C' respectively. They are meant to be guidelines to ensure that the interview exercise remained on course and at the same time remained flexible to any changes. An extract of these two appendixes is found in Figure 4 and Figure 5 accompanied by a short summary of its objectives.

Figure 4

Extract of interview questions taken from the 1st interview exercise

<u>Interview questions</u>	<u>Objective of questions</u>
1) How would you describe the education environment in your home country?	This is to understand the education environment of the participants' own country and what was it that caused them to seek education overseas.
2) How would you describe the classroom (teaching & learning) environment in your home country?	This is an attempt to understand in-depth the core issues of education in the participants' own country.
3) What do you think are the main reason(s) that prompted you to continue your education overseas?	This is an attempt to get the participants to express what caused them to seek education overseas. The answers helped to generate more interview questions and to test whether others felt the same way.

Figure 5

Extract of interview questions taken from the 2nd interview exercise

<u>Interview questions</u>	<u>Objective of questions</u>
(1) The Mainland Chinese government had spent billions of Yuan in education reform, since 1985. How do you think this has helped to improve education in your country, if at all?	This is to try and establish why the participants were still dissatisfied in spite of the huge spending by the Mainland Chinese government to reform education.
(2) How has the reform helped to improve teaching and learning, if at all?	This is to establish how the reform has changed the core issue of education, if any.
(3) The Mainland Chinese government is making great efforts in the education reform; Why do Mainland Chinese students still go overseas to study in large	The answer to this question helped to cross-check the earlier questions.

numbers?	
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A few days before the interviews took place, all participants were informed by email and telephone of the date, time and place. All candidates were reminded of their appointment by telephone a day before the actual interview. Prior to each interview, participants were reminded that the interview would be recorded by audio and video, a procedure they would have agreed to during earlier briefings. Participants below the age of 21 were asked to produce a consent letter duly signed by themselves and their guardian. A sample copy of the consent letter is located in Appendix 'G'. The participants were also informed again that they had the right to refuse to answer any of the questions put to them.

In the first data collection exercise, which began on 16 October, 2004, all 20 participants participated according to schedule. After each data-collection round, analysis was carried out accordingly. This included data collected from interviews, documents and observation during interviews. The interval for each round varied about 5 months. Both sets of interviews were recorded on video with audio tape recording as a backup. These were duly transcribed and coded. After each data collection exercise, several informal meetings were held with some participants to clarify ambiguities noted during the transcribing and also during the process of data analysis. Some of these clarifications were again raised with the rest of the participants during the second interviews. During this time, data were analysed on an on-going basis. It was towards the end of the second round of data analysis that the emerging theories were noted. The third round of interviews was used for member checking to firm-up the emerging theory. Member checking is the process of getting the individuals to review the researchers' report for accuracy and completeness (Punch, 1998; Gall et al., 1999). During this time, the researcher remained open to anything new that the participants might contribute either to enhance the emerging theory or to debunk it.

3.5.3 Documentary sources (*Diaries*)

Diaries were used as an additional form of data collection. This allowed the participants to record the data in privacy and in their own time. This method of data collection, apart from interviews, is favoured amongst qualitative researchers because it serves to remove any ambiguity of the language mentioned by Fontana & Frey (1994) and Creswell (1998). Also, in using this method, the researcher can make visible what is invisible and allow the reader to judge its importance or otherwise (Morrison & Galloway, 1996). It is also a very useful complementary tool in providing the means of generating a large amount of data with minimum effort from the researcher (Robson, 1993, p. 254).

This documentary source may help satisfy the ‘biases’ in qualitative research, in the sense that it provides an additional source for triangulation. This is in addition to the cross-checking of data from one participant against another during the two rounds of interviews conducted in this study. Triangulation here simply means cross-checking one source of data against another and is not to be confused with those discussed by Bogdan & Biklen (2003, p. 107). The triangulation in this study helps to improve rigour in data collection, which is “crucially important in naturalistic studies” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 283).

The diary used in this research was meant to show the activities of the student on a daily basis, for a period of one week. The first recording of diaries followed soon after the first interview. This was repeated during the second round of data collection.

Upon receipt of the diary from the participants, due diligence was made to analyse the diary entries. Codification was done and necessary points for clarification were marked out for further discussion either during casual meetings or following interviews. The same coding procedures were followed as with interview data.

A sample of a recorded diary entry, duly coded, is provided in Appendix ‘D’ and Appendix ‘E’ of this thesis. The former is an hourly summary recording of student daily activities and the latter is meant for them to write in more detail of what they actually did for the day. This proved to be very relevant because of the participants’ expression of their feelings and emotions, which in most instances were not captured in the hourly summary.

The diary recordings lasted slightly longer than the interviews because of the seven days required, and also some participants were caught up with their own school

activities, soon after the interviews were conducted. Although the recordings were straightforward, certain clarifications were made with the relevant participants during the informal meetings and again during the interview that followed.

3.5.4 Data storage

The interviews were recorded on digital video tapes using Panasonic® digital video camera (DVC) and audio tapes using Olympus® micro-cassette audio recorder as a backup. The audio tapes were used merely as a precaution in case the video equipment fails. However the fear turned out to be unfounded.

The DVC proved to be invaluable because the data can be downloaded into the Toshiba® Satellite laptop with a 'firewire' using Microsoft® Windows Movie Maker. A soft-copy file was created for each recorded interview. This was backed-up into an external storage device for safe-keeping. Additional precautions were taken to protect the loss of data by copying the respective files on to Digital Video Disc (DVD). The greatest advantage in using Microsoft® Windows Movie Maker is that once the file is created the researcher is able to replay any parts of the recordings immediately using Microsoft® Windows Media player 10. This method of recording and transcribing of data ensures that every bit of the conversation between the researcher and the participants is captured and the transcript checked before a final hard-copy is printed for data analysis. Another major advantage in using the Microsoft® office programs is that the combination of Microsoft® Word and Microsoft® Excel makes the analytical task so much easier, especially when it comes to sorting of data.

3.5.5 Summary of data collection activities

The data collection exercise lasted 16 months, commencing from 16 October 2004. In total, about 60 hours of one-to-one interviews and informal meetings were conducted with all relevant participants. In addition, a total of 40 x 7 days of diary

recordings were collected from the participants. This is equivalent to 280 days of documented record. A reasonable amount of time was also spent on literature review, seeking out participants, seeking permission from the relevant institutions to conduct the interviews and reserving appropriate rooms for the interviews.

The flexibility in allowing data collection to take its own course resulted in group interviews being aborted to avoid potentially embarrassing or uncomfortable gatherings of reluctant participants.

The data collection rounds were each followed by analysis according to the procedures laid out in grounded theory.

3.6 Data Analysis

It was noted earlier that grounded theory and its close association with the meta-theory of Symbolic Interactionism were appropriate in this investigation.

In line with the procedures of grounded theory, a systematic coding practice was carried out to build theory from the data with rigour during the process of research in order to develop sensitivity and integration needed. This is necessary to generate a well-integrated explanatory theory that closely represents the reality of the phenomenon under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 55). The process of analysis begins with breaking down raw data into concepts, which are known as the basic building blocks of theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 74). The concepts that appear similar to the same phenomenon are then grouped together to form their respective categories and its sub-categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 63-65). The data analysis from the development of concepts to theory involves three levels of coding. They are: (1) Open coding; (2) Axial coding and (3) Selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 58).

During the analytic process, the researcher adopts a flexible position in allowing the analysis to flow back and forth within the three coding procedures because as explained earlier, sampling and analysis go in tandem, with analysis guiding the data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 178). This is also known as the flip-flop technique during the development of concepts and categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990,

p. 84). This procedure will then lead to producing the core category, which is needed in the writing of the theory (Punch, 1998, pp. 213-215). The following section will illustrate how the coding was executed in this study.

3.6.1 *Open coding*

This is the first stage of the coding process. This stage of coding involves the ‘breaking-up’ of data, which is then named and labelled. Each of these labels is then closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences. This will then be used to try and understand the phenomena as reflected in the data. The key question is: “What is this piece of data an example of?” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62). The reason for doing this is to find theoretical possibilities in the data which can generate abstract conceptual categories and to develop further theories. The categories are developed along the lines of their properties, each with their respective dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 69). Through all this process, one’s own and others’ assumptions about phenomena are questioned or explored, leading to new discoveries (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 62-63).

The use of this open coding was carried out during the pilot study with three other potential participants mentioned earlier. This was similarly applied to all the two data collection rounds that followed after the study actually began. All the transcripts and documents were analysed with the code words written in the right hand column of the respective papers. A sample of this coding, which is copied from the transcript of the second interview, is shown in Figure 6 below. Separately, two varied document samples, with coding, are shown in Figure 7 and Figure 8. The coding is done either word by word, line by line or by paragraph (Glaser, 1978, p. 70). In particular, catchy words or phrases are noted as these make good *in vivo* codes, which ‘tend to be the behaviours or processes which will explain to the analyst how the basic problem of the actors is resolved or processed’. It also “fractures the data directly because they represent analytic categories, as used by the researcher” (Strauss, 1987, p. 33). The whole exercise of this stage of coding is on generating grounded abstract concepts, which can become the building blocks for the subsequent theory (Punch, 1998, p. 211).

Both samples of open coding on interview transcripts and documents are located in Figure 6 to Figure 8 as follows:

Figure 6

Extract of transcript from GR2 (13) Tape Two
Time: 12.00pm

Date of interview: 9/4/05

Tape Counter	Interviewer	Participant	Coding
3.38	Why do students say that the strength of Chinese education system is the foundation course but at the same time they also say the system is also not pragmatic?	The system of education in China is very theoretical; whatever we learn maybe of no use in the real world. So when you graduate from the university, you are so lost. Another reason is that there are too many students for the labour market. The labour market wants people with certain experience. Those with no experience will probably get lower salary. Graduates joining the labour market have various expectations. So when they can't meet the higher requirement, it's an embarrassment. Maybe that's why students are not satisfied with the education system.	Pragmatism; Useless learning; Disappointment; Population; Job requirements; Consequences; Expectations; Requirements; Unequal expectations; Consequences; Disappointment.

Figure 7

Extract from Diary of GR1(1)

Hourly summary of weekly diary
Date of recording: 18 Oct 2004

Time	Details of activities	Coding
------	-----------------------	--------

6.00 _{am}	Sleeping	Sleep routine
7.00 _{am}	Sleeping and got up at 7:30	Sleep; Time awake
8.00 _{am}	Had breakfast while going to school, then physics lecture	Breakfast; Lecture
9.00 _{am}	Physics lecture	Lecture
10.00 _{am}	Physics lecture and then break, then math lecture	Lecture; Rest; Lecture

Figure 8

Extract from Diary of GR1(1)

Daily summary of weekly diary
Date of recording: 18 Oct 2004

Summary of the day's activities	Coding
Sleep well, never woke up	Sleep routine
Still a bit sleepy, time goes too fast in the morning, hahah	Tired
The bread was good, I always think so. It's a bit far to walk to school every morning from my hall, but good exercise!	Breakfast; Good attitude
I seemed to understand all the lecturer talked about, just never felt anything while he spoke, don't know why, maybe a bit tired.	Inattentive; Tired

During the process of coding, two basic analytic procedures were observed. These were - asking questions and making comparisons. As mentioned earlier, it is for this reason that grounded theory is often referred to in the literature as “the constant comparative method of analysis” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 101-116; Strauss, 1987, p. 30). These procedures are necessary to give the concepts their precision and specificity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 62-63).

During the data collection exercise, code notes were kept to keep track of the initial names for concepts. A sample of this is shown in Figure 10. This is also known as memo that consists of actual products that emerge from the three types of coding, such as, conceptual labels, paradigm features, and indications of process. Code notes also serve to describe and explain the conceptual labels which emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 197). The coding procedures also include the necessary coding paradigm to guide the process of analysis (Strauss, 1987, p. 29). The coding paradigm was used throughout the study to indicate the relationship between the data, the coding and the memoing. Theoretical memos were also regularly written throughout the studies, which contain the researcher's inductive and deductive thoughts

Figure 10 – Sample of Code notes

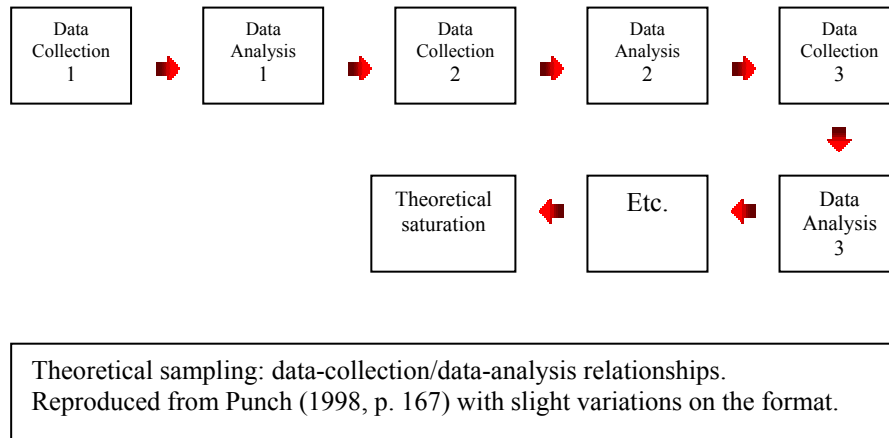
Date: October 2004 Ref: OC/TR/EX1/GR1(1) Participant Code: GR1(1)	Date of data collected: 16 October 04 Transcript page: 2
Code name : Admission Related codes : Grades : Talents : Guanxi : Top University : Normal University	
<p>Code note: This category provides an insight into the selection criteria for students to enter the university. It shows the different admission requirements of different universities. The top university will require applicants to have top grades attained from their national college entrance examination. In some circumstances, top students are recommended to the university even before they graduate. This is called ‘bao Song’. Students who have special talents in sports or academic skills will also be given special preference although their score maybe lower than the published requirements</p> <p>Question: (1) Are there any restriction on students who do not live within the vicinity or province of the university? (2) What happens to those who cannot get into the top university? (3) What happens to those who have low scores but whose parents are influential?</p> <p>Extent – wide</p> <p>What study are these data pertinent to? Compulsion analysis Consequence analysis</p>	

3.6.2 *Categorising*

The categorising stage was activated whenever substantial concepts or groups were formed during the coding of raw data. As concepts are being developed from the initial raw data with a label given to each concept; categorising groups the concepts together. As explained earlier, categories are developed along the lines of their properties and dimensions. According to Strauss & Corbin (1990), both are important to distinguish and methodically develop because they provide the foundation for making relationships between categories and sub-categories (pp. 69-70). The different categories are integrated to show up the core category, which explains the whole phenomenon. While the naming of concepts and categories may seem to be an identical task, the name or label given to each is actually distinctly different because categorising labels are more abstract than those given to concepts. This is to ensure that the respective labels are appropriate and easily remembered and retrieved for analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 65-68).

In order to show the rigours of the data analysis, the whole research project was put through a systematic flow of data collection and data analysis. This is better illustrated in a flowchart taken from Punch (1998, p. 167) with slight variations on the format but not the text due to the limitations of the computer software.

Figure 11 - Theoretical sampling chart



As shown in the diagram, there are three sets of data collection and data analysis. Each set of data is followed immediately by analysis. The result of the analysis determines whether any changes need to be made such as the interview questions, the population target or the sample size -- before proceeding to the next stage of data collection and analysis. As the diagram shows, sampling continues until the data reaches saturation, that is, nothing new can be generated from the data collection. In regards to this study, the data collection exercise ended after the second round. The third round was more for member-checking rather than actual data-collection.

3.6.3 Axial coding

Strauss & Corbin (1990) define axial coding as: “A set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories. This is done by using a coding paradigm, involving: conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences” (p. 96). This process helps increase knowledge about the relationships between that category and other categories and sub-categories, which at the same time builds up a dense texture of conceptualisation (Strauss, 1987, p. 32). Some call this theoretical coding because of the way the substantive categories, produced from the first-order concept from the first stage, are interlinked and organised (Punch, 1998, p. 215).

They further explain that the focus in axial coding is to specify “a category (*phenomenon*) in terms of the conditions that give rise to it; the context (its specific set of *properties*) in which it is embedded; the action/interactional strategies by which it is

handled, managed, carried; and the (*consequences*) of those strategies” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 97).

As soon as open coding of data was done, the process of axial coding was applied to build around the categories generated from the data. The purpose was to develop a dense texture of “relationships around the axis” (Strauss, 1987, p. 64). A theory or assumption was attached to the relationships between each category and its subcategories. These are then examined using the flip-flop technique mentioned earlier.

In a process quite similar to open coding, code notes and memos were also drafted to illustrate how categories and their subcategories are related.

An example of this axial coding, using the model of Strauss & Corbin (1990), is applied to the category entitled “Push Factors”, which is shown in Figure 12 as follows:

Figure 12 – Sample of Axial coding - theoretical memo

Date: 17 October 2004 Other ref: TR/GR2(13)/Ex.2 This ref: AC/1000	Date of data collected: Oct/Nov 04
Causal Condition →	Phenomenon
<i>Limitations</i>	<i>Push Factors</i>
Properties of <i>Limitations</i>	Specific dimensions of <i>Push Factors</i>
Funding Teaching & Learning Pragmatism Research Societal culture	Extent – Wide Intensity – High Potential for consequences – High Boundaries – Nationwide
Context: Under conditions of <i>Push Factors</i> , which is wide-spread amongst the education institutions in Mainland China, the intensity of <i>Push Factors</i> to seek better education overseas is high. The potential for consequences relating to <i>Push Factors</i> is also high. The boundary is nationwide, in view of the societal culture.	
Intervening conditions: The invisible force of societal culture creates an additional force for Mainland Chinese university students to seek better education overseas.	
Action/interaction Strategies for <i>Push Factors</i>: The many limitations within the country's education system cause the participants to look beyond their shores for better education. Some were even encouraged by their supervisors (from the best universities in Mainland China) to further their studies in Singapore. Some seized the opportunity when Universities in Singapore offered them scholarships or tuition grants to study here. Those who were self-sponsored too found Singapore to be attractive in terms of quality education and low cost. Participants perceive the education system in Mainland China as not pragmatic enough. Able participants seek to get to the best university in Mainland China, failing which, they will seize the opportunity to venture overseas for a quality education.	
Consequences: The consequence of <i>Push Factors</i> is the departure of Mainland Chinese university students to other countries like Singapore to seek quality education.	

3.6.4 Selective coding

Strauss & Corbin (1990) define selective coding as: “The process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (p. 116).

This stage of coding involves selecting a core category from the interlinked substantive categories produced from the axial or theoretical coding stage (Strauss, 1987, p. 69). The whole purpose of selective coding is to develop the abstract, condensed, integrated and grounded picture of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 117; Punch, 1998, p. 217).

In this study, selective coding was done from the categories generated from open and axial coding. During the process of selective coding, the emerging story line was noted when the relationships amongst the different categories were linked together (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 119). A general descriptive overview of the story is as follows:

In answering the two research questions, the selective coding generated four specific categories, which are: (1) Push Factors; (2) Pull Factors; (3) Individual Resilience and (4) Future Intentions.

The *Push Factors* provides an explanation of what causes Mainland China students to want to seek educational excellence overseas. The general consensus amongst the participants was that the educational environment in their own country creates the compulsion for them to seize the opportunity to study overseas.

The *Pull Factors* shows why the students chose to study in Singapore instead of elsewhere. The main ‘pull’ seemed to be the cost of studying in Singapore, in which many of the participants were either on full scholarship or on tuition grant. However, some who were self-sponsored also found the cost, *inter-alia*, of studying in Singapore relatively inexpensive.

The *Individual Resilience* shows how the students manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment. While the participants were full of praise for the whole education and living environment in Singapore, there were still problems. However they were able to circumvent those difficulties through pragmatism and ingenuity.

The *Future Intentions* is a category that discusses the long term plans of the participants. That is, what will they do after they graduate from the university in Singapore?

Three types of participants were identified: (1) Intellectuals; (2) Loyalists and (3) Opportunists. These types are fully explained in chapter 6. The emergence of the typology and the distinct categories generated from the grounded data led to the theory of Selective Pragmatism.

Selective Pragmatism is a multifarious theory that consists of four distinctive categories and three typologies of the participants. The story-line explains the participants' view on the education climate of Mainland China, their perceived view on the availability of the best education outside their own country, their perceptions of Singapore as a place for education and what are their long term intentions after they graduate from their university in Singapore.

This short narrative was used by the researcher as the basis for developing the fully integrated theory to address the research questions: (1) Why students from Mainland China choose to study in Singapore? (as opposed to elsewhere) and (2) How they manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment?

As in open coding and axial coding, the researcher prepared theoretical codes to ensure that the trustworthiness of the theoretical framework is able to withstand close probing or inspection. A sample of the theoretical coding note written during the selective coding is located in Figure 13 as follows:

Figure 13 – Sample of Selective coding - Theoretical Memo

Processes and sub-processes of the categories: “Push Factors”; “Pull Factors”; “Individual Resilience”; and “Future Intentions”.

SELECTIVE PRAGMATISM is a multifarious theory which consists of four distinctive categories and three typologies. This memo will only elaborate on the distinctive categories which, in essence, explain the core category in four parts.

PUSH FACTORS is the first category in which participants perceive their own country’s limited education environment as one that would stifle their prospects. They were dissatisfied with just passing examinations that were traditionally required of scholars from the days of Confucius. Their hunger for pragmatic learning and quality education creates a compulsion for them to seize the opportunity to venture overseas. The fear for their own future and the demand of their societal culture fuelled their determination to want to succeed.

PULL FACTORS is the second category which describes how participants were attracted to education in Singapore. Amongst the attractions were the full scholarships or tuition grants offered to them.

INDIVIDUAL RESILIENCE is the third category, which is the result of their experience in Singapore. It shows how they manage their education in a different cultural environment. While all of them are satisfied with their study and living condition, they were troubled by the way English language is spoken in Singapore. In addition, some found it difficult to adjust socially and psychologically to a new cultural environment.

FUTURE INTENTIONS is the fourth category that discusses the participants’ future plans after they graduate from the universities in Singapore.

3.7 Trustworthiness Of The Grounded Theory Of ‘Selective Pragmatism’

This is perhaps one of the most contentious issues between the positivist and interpretivist researchers. The arguments are mainly over the conventional criteria of trustworthiness, consisting of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. Positivist and interpretivist researchers, naturally, have their own respective perceptions on how their research can be measured by a third party based on its authenticity and the degree of trust. As this study is located in the interpretivist paradigm, it adopts the proposal of Guba (1981) that the above conventional criteria of trustworthiness be replaced with Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability respectively. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 219) suggest some important techniques, which are illustrated in Figure 14, together with their suggestions on replacing conventional criteria with the criterion of trustworthiness.

Figure 14 – Conventional criteria, Trustworthiness and Technique

Conventional Criteria	Replaced by criterion of Trustworthiness	Technique
Internal validity	Credibility	Prolonged engagement; Persistent observation; Triangulation; Peer debriefing; Negative case analysis; Member checking.
External validity	Transferability	Thick description;
Reliability	Dependability	The dependability audit, including the audit trail
Objectivity	Confirmability	The confirmability audit, including the audit trail

As trustworthiness is a vital issue in qualitative study (Gall et al., 1999; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Creswell, 1998), this thesis has diligently tried to follow the guideline mentioned above. However, the present researcher neither claims nor pretends that the end result is so ‘water-tight’ that it becomes unchallengeable. As Lincoln & Guba (1985) say: “...naturalistic criteria of trustworthiness are open-ended; they can never be satisfied to such an extent that the trustworthiness of the inquiry could be labelled as

unassailable” (p. 329). The following discusses how the above criteria were implemented in this study with a discussion on generalisability in view of its importance in research.

Credibility was addressed with the help of prolonged engagement with the participants through interviews, diaries and literature study, which lasted 16 months. The three methods of data collection also serve as a form of triangulation. The issue of credibility is connected with member checking. This process was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of Punch (1998), which involves showing the interview transcripts to the respective participants for their verification before data analysis began. The other recommendation of Punch (1998) was carried out throughout the data collection exercise, which involves “taking the developing products of the research – its concepts, propositions, and the emerging cognitive map – back to the participants for confirmation, validation and verification” (p. 260). In this study, the final round of member-checking was carried out during the third interview, where the whole process leading to the emerging theory was presented to the respective participants for authentication.

Transferability is a word that is preferred over generalisability (Punch, 1998, p. 261) because this is a qualitative research study and its aim is not to make generalisations in a way which quantitative studies aim to do. It is therefore more appropriate to state at this point that the research is meant only for the place and time stipulated in this thesis. Whether or not the result of the research is transferable is left entirely to the discretion of future researchers or readers, who may inquire into similar or related topics. Mainland China is a large and complex country and the fast changing circumstances within the country may in all likelihood produce a different generation of university students with views which are different from those covered in this report. Although the researcher attempted to cover a wider target area by including participants from different parts of Mainland China, this is not to be construed as an attempt to generalise but merely to give this study a better understanding of Mainland Chinese university students’ diverse perceptions of studying in Singapore, depending on their economic background and where they come from. Although Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that transferability is “in a strict sense, impossible” (p. 316), the researcher has endeavoured to meet the requirements of *thick description* so necessary for judgments

of transferability and to “provide a sufficient base to permit a person contemplating application in another receiving setting to make the needed comparisons of similarity” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 359-360).

In total, a very large data set of about 289 pages of transcript and 362 pages of diaries (containing nearly 200,000 words) was generated, in addition to code notes, theoretical notes and memos generated throughout the study.

Generalisibility, together with validity and reliability, are terms that Denzin & Lincoln (1994) foresaw as a problem in qualitative research. Lincoln & Guba (1985, p. 38) suggest that the aim of the positivist’s inquiry is to “develop a nomothetic body of knowledge in the form of generalisation that can stand the test of time and place” whereas the naturalist’s aim was to “develop an idiographic body of knowledge in the form of ‘working hypotheses’ that describe the individual case.”

Dependability was addressed by way of keeping a systematic record that would enable a reader to trace every individual record from the inception to the development of the core category in this study. Lincoln & Guba (1985) liken this to an audit trail in an accounting system. As in accounting, every transaction is recorded systematically in a set of records. This enables the auditors to examine the books whenever necessary, but usually at the end of the company’s financial year, to determine that every transaction is accounted for or supported and easily traceable (pp. 316-318). In this thesis, dependability is thus heavily reliant on a set of records, which shows how concepts, categories, core categories and the typologies were systematically generated from the data. This is to satisfy the ‘auditors’ that the records are internally coherent so that the ‘bottom line’ may be accepted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318). As in accounting, the records in this study are listed in a summary of records for ‘audit trail’, an example of which is located in Appendix ‘H’.

Confirmability is addressed with multiple data sources (triangulation), such as interviews and documents. In order to establish how or whether the theory is grounded, the audit trail used in the dependability criterion can be similarly activated to trace back where a ‘piece’ of data comes from. Finally, the source of the core category can be traced back to the various stages of data analysis in open coding, axial coding and selective coding. All the labels, code notes, theoretical notes and memos are systematically kept so that an audit can be carried out in a similar systematic order, if

necessary (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 323). In other words, the audit trail serves to cover both the dependability and confirmability criterion.

Finally, authenticity was also secured by the use of digital video recording, complemented by audio recording and documents (Burns, 1997).

3.8 Researcher's positioning in respect of the research

The researcher's interest in this study was prompted by many years of professional experience in the recruitment of students, especially from Mainland China and Vietnam. However, this research will only focus on Mainland Chinese university students studying in Singapore so that an in-depth focus can be maintained. The researcher has also had first-hand experience of Chinese universities and a strong familiarity with Singapore universities.

3.9 Limitations of the study

Data for the study were collected from 20 participants with 2 replacements. The main forms of data collection were the use of semi-structured interviews and participants' diaries. There are a number of methodological limitations owing to the small sample.

A small number of participants were chosen because the purpose of this study was to build a theory for the group of students interviewed. There was no intention of generalising the research across a complex country of more than 1 billion people. However, in describing the students' contexts and personal details in depth, it may be possible for other students in similar situations to draw parallels between themselves and the students studied in this research investigation.

A further limitation is the collection of data via interviews and documents submitted by the participants. In the case of interviews, the data can only be taken at face value and is wholly dependent on what the participants have revealed. The researcher made strenuous efforts to cross-check their views by approaching the same

issues from different lines of questioning and triangulation. In addition, the contentious issue of interviewer bias cannot be totally eliminated. Similarly, the data from the diary entries also has its limitations. The reason is that diaries are often merely text without emotion. It can be difficult therefore to gauge the intensity of how the participants feel in a particular situation. Although the interview may clarify certain points, it is almost impossible to eradicate the ambiguity of the language (Fontana & Frey, 1994). For this reason, much time, patience and constant interaction with the participants in checking and counter-checking the data was required to filter out bias. This is often done through additional meetings with the participants. In this case, these meetings were usually at lunch time when most of the students were available for an informal chat. These chats were not recorded because of background noise. The gist of the conversations (memos) was immediately transferred to the computer as soon as that could be done. These were sometimes counter-checked with other participants. There were also time and budgetary constraints. Because every participant was only in Singapore for a limited period of time -- some were soon to graduate and leave Singapore altogether -- any necessary verification of data would prove to be very difficult, if not impossible. Also, since the participants had to contribute to the interviews as well as record weekly diaries on a daily basis, any lengthening of the data collection exercise might very quickly mean loss of interest in participation. Apart from the time required to interview, transcribe, collate and analyse the data over 16 months, the study also faced a budget constraint because the research was unfunded. For these reasons, the number of participants was capped at 20 to keep the study manageable.

3.10 Ethics

Although the study is a private matter between the researcher and the participants, due respect was given to both the participants as well as the institutions concerned. The respective institutions were informed of the study and their assistance was sought to recommend any suitable participants. Their permission was also sought in using their premises for interviews.

All participants were given a full briefing on the purpose of the research and interview, on a one-to-one basis; or in small groups, if the participants were known to each other. Those who were below the age of 21 were asked to produce a consent letter duly signed by their guardian in Singapore. A sample of this is located in Appendix 'G'.

It was explained to them during the briefing and again on the day of the interview that audio and video recordings would be used to for the sole purpose of ensuring the authenticity and trustworthiness of the interview. Assurance was given to all participants on the privacy and confidentiality of their participation and information they provided to encourage the participants to speak freely. They were told they could stop the interview or withdraw their participation at any point. Two participants exercised their rights when they withdrew from the second data collection exercise. In accordance with the confidentiality assurance given to the participants, all participants were identified only by their code number in this thesis, as explained in detail earlier. They were also assured that the audio and video recordings of the interview would be destroyed once it had served its academic purpose.

3.11 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has established the justification for using a qualitative grounded theory approach in the study of the phenomenon involving Mainland Chinese university students' perceptions of studying in Singapore.

The methodological focus of the study is based on grounded theory, underpinned by the assumptions of the interpretive paradigm, and the meta-theory of Symbolic Interactionism on human behaviour. The process of inquiry thus includes theoretical sampling, data collection, and data analysis; using open coding, axial coding and selective coding. These procedures led to the many generated concepts being clustered into the respective categories, which was again put through the various stages of analysis to develop the core category of Selective Pragmatism. The selective code or core category and the story line are outlined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Theory of ‘Selective Pragmatism’

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the theory of selective pragmatism that finally emerged from rounds of data collection and analysis. In one sense it is misplaced at this point in the thesis, since it presents the final story line, and outlines the selective code and core category before, rather than after, the detailed analysis and findings are presented in chapters 5 and 6. However, the justification in inserting it at this point in the thesis is in sketching an overview of the theory that was constructed so that the reader can better understand and locate the detailed conceptual development and data analysis and interpretation that follows in subsequent chapters.

This study investigates Mainland Chinese university students' perceptions of studying in Singapore. The process of data collection is guided by the process of systematic coding which determines when theoretical saturation is reached (see Figure 11, reproduced from Punch, 1998, p. 167). During data analysis, many labels were hypothetically generated during the open coding stage. This led to the formation of concepts and categories at the axial coding stage, which in turn led to the grounded theory of Selective Pragmatism (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 61 - 63). The linking of the categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 107-110) was carried out at the axial coding stage, which involves putting the different 'scripts' together to form the whole story at the selective coding stage. The detailed story, including the processes and categories of the theory of Selective Pragmatism, will be presented in Chapters Five and Six of this thesis.

The theory will be presented in three main parts. They are: (1) The participants, (2) The story line and (3) The hypothesis. The hypotheses are sub-divided into: (a) The overall hypothesis of Selective Pragmatism; (b) Hypothesis with regards to the general theory of Selective Pragmatism; (c) Hypothesis with regards to the processes of Selective Pragmatism; (d) Hypothesis with regards to how the processes and categories of Selective Pragmatism are understood within the context of: (i) Participants' perceptions of education in Mainland China; (ii) Participants' perceptions of education

overseas; (iii) Participants' experience of their education in Singapore (iv) Future plans and (e) Hypothesis with regards to the typology of participants.

4.1 The Participants

Details of the participants provided in Chapter 3 and Appendix 'F' show how the participants were sampled and from where they came. As this section forms part of the overall investigation, all or part of the information provided earlier may be repeated as necessary to maintain the story's continuity.

While the researcher has tried to satisfy the criterion of 'trustworthiness' by providing as much information as possible, the identity and interest of the participants also had to be protected. Therefore, the faculties of study to which participants belong and the names of their universities in Mainland China are not divulged.

In order to ensure that the theory is solidly grounded in the data, much of the discussion about the participants in the story is related to how various issues relating to the phenomenon interact. For example, by seeking the participants' perceptions of the education environment in their own country, the researcher was able to understand the circumstances that led to their desire to seek education overseas. While they all come from the same country, and share a similar language, race and culture, they have different views of the education system in their own country and the process of adaptation to living and studying in Singapore. However, all displayed traits that are captured by the theory of Selective Pragmatism.

As Appendix 'F' has shown, the participants are almost equally divided into two distinct groups, according to age. The greater experience and maturity of the older participants showed in their confidence during the first interview. The participants each related their own original 'stories'. These different 'stories' were carefully analysed by the researcher and then systematically presented. The characteristics of each participant were also carefully noted and used to help generate the typology. This is further supported by a detailed explanation of how the processes and categories are interlinked to form the theory of Selective Pragmatism.

4.2 The Story of Selective Pragmatism

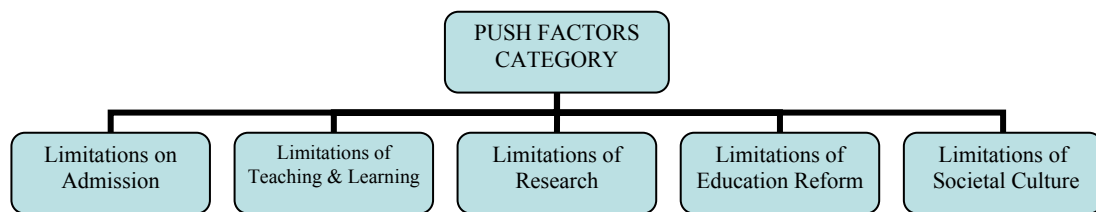
The story of Selective Pragmatism is made up of a typology consisting of three types of participants, as follows: (1) “Intellectuals”; (2) “Loyalists” and (3) “Opportunists”. The emergence of the typology and the distinct categories generated from the grounded data lead to the theory of Selective Pragmatism. All three types are pragmatic, but in different ways and for different reasons. The Intellectuals are primarily driven by the pragmatic pursuit of the highest academic and scholastic standards. Their reasons for leaving China (Push Factors) and seeking higher education overseas (Pull Factors) are motivated by the desire to challenge themselves intellectually. Higher academic knowledge is seen as intrinsically valuable. Their resilience comes from their academic self-belief and their future intentions are based on further pursuit of academic goals and success. The Loyalists, on the other hand, are primarily driven by the pragmatic pursuit of a higher education that will maximize their contributions to the people and economy of the Mainland upon their return. They are not as critical of the Mainland’s higher education system and are stout defenders of their country. The “Opportunists” are likewise pragmatically driven, but in a different way. They are concerned with seeking out and exploiting the best opportunities for themselves – whether they be in Singapore, the UK or the USA. They are opportunistic in that they are prepared to go wherever financial assistance can be obtained in the form of grants and scholarships.

The theory of Selective Pragmatism is in turn embellished by four distinct categories, in which category two is made up of two parts. The categories are: (1) Push Factors; (2a) Pull Factors (Other countries outside Mainland China but excluding Singapore); (2b) Pull Factors (Singapore only); (3) Individual Resilience and (4) Future Intentions. Each category is in turn supported by its respective concepts and is presented as follows.

4.2.1 *Category Push Factors*

The Push Factor category comprises of five different concepts with each having a dimension of limitation. Each concept of the category tells a different story of how the participants view the education environment in Mainland China and the limitations which lead them to consider pursuing their education overseas. This in turn leads to the emergence of the first category (Push Factor). The category is illustrated in Figure 15.

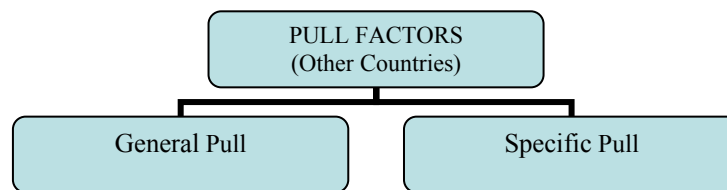
Figure 15
Push Factors Category Chart



4.2.2 *Category Pull Factors (Other countries outside Mainland China but excluding Singapore)*

This is the first part of the Pull Factor Category, which discusses Mainland Chinese university students' perceptions of education in other countries, excluding Singapore. The wisdom of presenting the Pull Factor category in two parts was due to the revelation by most participants that they would have preferred, given the opportunity, to further their education in either the USA or UK. This part of the category carries its own concept as to what attraction these two countries offer. The category with its concepts is illustrated in Figure 16.

Figure 16
Pull Factors Category – First sub-category (Other Countries) Chart

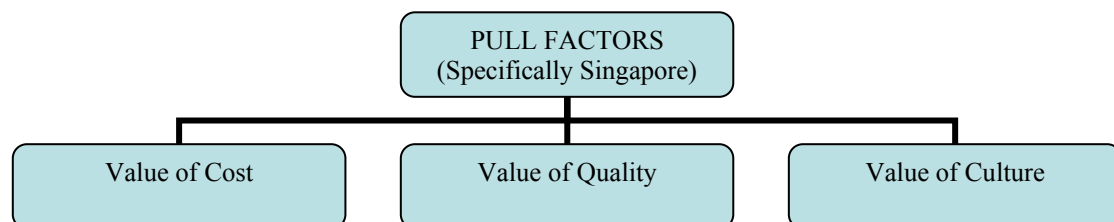


4.2.2.1 Category Pull Factors (Singapore only)

The second part of the Pull Factor category, which carries its own set of concepts, provides a platform to discuss the research question - Why do university students from Mainland China choose to study in Singapore? (As opposed to elsewhere). As illustrated in Figure 17, the concepts surrounding the category show how Singapore differs from other countries, in terms of Mainland Chinese university students' perceptions of education.

Figure 17

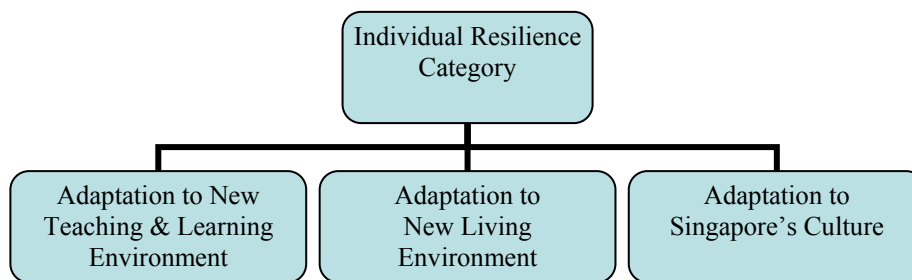
Pull Factors Category – Second sub-category (Specifically Singapore) Chart



4.2.3 Category of Individual Resilience

The category of Individual Resilience focuses on the research question - how do Mainland Chinese university students manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment? This category is divided into two parts. The first part deals with their experiences both on and off campus. It reveals the discrepancy between their perceptions of Singapore before and after their experiences of studying there. The second part deals with how the participants coped with the various issues relating to studying and living in Singapore by showing resilience in the face of difficulty. The issues to be discussed are illustrated in Figure 18.

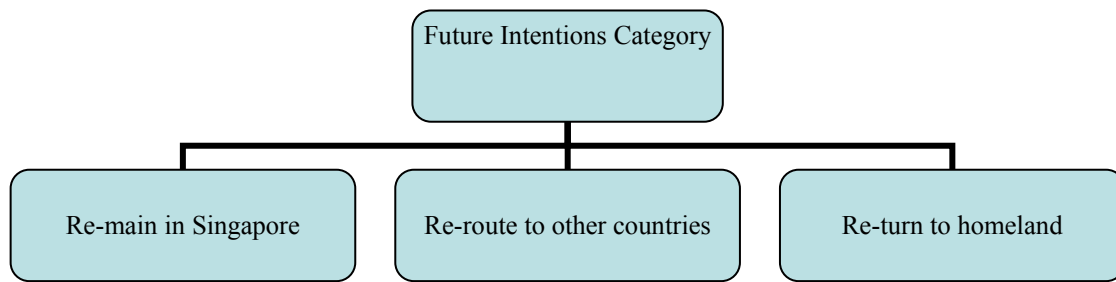
Figure 18
Individual Resilience Category Chart



4.2.4 *Category of Future Intentions*

This category analyses the long-term plans of the participants as to what they will do either upon their graduation from their universities in Singapore or after they have fulfilled the obligations associated with their scholarships or tuition grants. The reasons they give provide a useful indication of the long-term goals of Mainland Chinese university students and whether more needs to be done to entice them to stay in Singapore to help fulfil the island's demand for skilled labour.

Figure 19
Future Intentions Category Chart



The Figures 15 to 19 above show how each category is supported by its own set of concepts. The process of Selective Pragmatism flows through and underpins all the concepts and categories in chronological order beginning with the Push Factor Category. It shows how participants exercise selective pragmatism in each of the categories.

The following section discusses the propositions of the theory of Selective Pragmatism beginning with the main hypothesis.

4.3 The Main Hypothesis of Selective Pragmatism

This section presents the theory of Selective Pragmatism with different sets of inter-related hypotheses, as mentioned in the early part of this chapter. The first hypothesis discusses the General Theory of Selective Pragmatism. The second set discusses the processes of the theory. The third set discusses how the processes and categories of Selective Pragmatism are understood within the context of: (1) Participants' perceptions of education in Mainland China; (2) Participants' perceptions of overseas' education; (3) Participants' experiences of their education in Singapore and (4) Future plans. The fourth set discusses the hypothesis relating to the typology of participants.

4.3.1 *Hypothesis on the General Theory of Selective Pragmatism*

The source of the theory can be traced back to the education environment within Mainland China; participants exercise selective pragmatism in overcoming the problems of the Chinese system by seeking an education overseas. Although Singapore shares many similarities with Mainland China in terms of race, language, culture and religion, the participants still faced numerous difficulties in their new learning and living environment. Again, the participants overcome the obstacles through selective pragmatism and resilience. Finally, as to what they will do after they fulfil their obligations in Singapore upon their graduation, most are realistic as to what each country can offer before they decide either to remain in Singapore, return to their homeland or migrate to a third country.

4.3.2 Hypothesis on the Processes of Selective Pragmatism

The theory of Selective Pragmatism emerges from the process of the four main inter-linked categories. They are: (1) Push Factors; (2) Pull Factors; (3) Individual Resilience and (4) Future Intentions. The second category “Pull Factors” is sub-divided into two parts. The processes of all the categories, including the respective sub-divided parts, are discussed as follows:

The first category, “Push Factors” (Figure 15) consists of five inter-related concepts of limitation relating to the education environment within Mainland China and the reasons why Mainland Chinese university students choose to further their university education overseas. This category can be said to initiate the first action that causes a reaction which leads to the emergence of the second category (Pull Factor). This category is divided into two parts in accordance with the reactions.

The first part of the second category “Pull Factors”, (Figure 16) consists of five inter-related concepts relating to the perceptions of Mainland Chinese university students on their preferred countries, such as, the USA and UK. The second part of the same category, as illustrated in Figure 17, consists of four concepts relating to why they finally decided to further their university education in Singapore. This process leads to the emergence of the third category, “Individual Resilience”.

“Individual Resilience” consists of five concepts, as illustrated in Figure 18, relating to how Mainland Chinese university students in Singapore cope with their new environment. The question of what they will do upon their graduation leads to the emergence of their “Future intentions”, which forms the fourth and final category (Figure 19).

As discussed above, the process involved in all four categories is a result of action and reaction from the respective categories. Finally, the participants’ reactions as captured in each of the categories, results in the emergence of the core category - Selective Pragmatism.

4.3.3 Hypothesis on how the processes and categories of selective pragmatism are understood within the context of (i) the underlying reasons that cause Mainland Chinese university students to continue their education overseas; (ii) the participants’ perception of overseas’ education; (iii) the participants’ experience of their education in Singapore and (iv) their future plans.

The four distinct categories of Selective Pragmatism flow in a chronological order of (1) Push Factors; (2) Pull Factors; (3) Individual Resilience and (4) Future Intentions.

Participants exercise different degrees of Selective Pragmatism since they have differing opinions on many issues. These differences are captured in the distinct categories. Hence, there is no unanimous acceptance of all or some of the inter-related concepts within all or some of the categories. As in the first category, “Push Factors” participants were selectively pragmatic in terms of the various concepts linked to the category. Hence they may differ in their opinion on the many limitations that compel them to continue their education overseas. For example, the opinion that access to funding contributes to their seeking education overseas may differ from one participant to another because funding structures differ from university to university. The differences may also vary between the major cities, like Beijing, and that of poorer provinces such as Tibet.

Similarly, participants also exercise Selective Pragmatism towards the “Pull Factors” or attractions from their preferred countries, including Singapore. Although the participants may strongly prefer the USA and UK as study destinations, they are

selectively pragmatic that Singapore universities are a good alternative because of their lower costs, high quality and funding support.

Participants were able to exercise selective pragmatism in coping with the problems they encountered in and outside the campus in Singapore. So, participants who face language difficulties are able to overcome the problems by working harder on their own rather than passively accepting the situation. Some simply look for another tutorial class with a tutor that they are comfortable with. Participants who find local food unpalatable soon adapt or face hunger. Their decisions are thus based on pragmatism rather than loyalty to a country. Their differences in character, opinions and decisions enable them to be grouped and from these groupings, a typology to be formed.

4.3.4 Hypothesis in regard to the Typology of Participants

The typology of participants emerges as part of the grounded theory. It explains the participants' reactions based on the four categories. As mentioned earlier, the participants do not always share the same opinions on issues. Their opinions allow for the emergence of the typology that is presented in Chapter Six.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theory of Selective Pragmatism with discussion on the various propositions relating to the theory. It then provided different sets of hypotheses relating to the general theory of Selective Pragmatism and how the processes and the categories formed from them can be understood within the specific phenomenon of Mainland Chinese students studying overseas and how the typology of the participants can be related to it.

The hypotheses presented in this chapter will now be expounded in full in Chapter Five, showing the concepts and categories which lead to the grounded theory

of Selective Pragmatism. These in turn provide the groundwork for discussion in Chapter Six on how the typology of participants is related to the four categories.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Concepts and Categories of the Theory of 'Selective Pragmatism'

5.0 Introduction

The theory of 'Selective Pragmatism' was summarised and presented in the preceding chapter as a 'story line' followed by a concise presentation of the categories and processes of 'Selective Pragmatism'. This provides an outline of the structural design or 'architecture' of the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 231). This chapter will present the full story using the categories and processes of 'Selective Pragmatism,' with full reference to the data.

This chapter is structured into the following main Sections:

- 5.1 Participants Identification System
- 5.2 Category Push Factors
- 5.3 Category Pull Factors
- 5.4 Category Individual Resilience
- 5.5 Category Future Intentions
- 5.6 Conclusion

5.1 Participants Identification System

The study began with a group of Mainland Chinese university students studying at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Nanyang Technological University (NTU). Twenty two participants were interviewed in total -- eight (plus one replacement) postgraduate students from the NUS doing either Masters or Doctorate courses; ten (plus one replacement) undergraduate participants from the NTU doing degree courses and two from National Institute of Education (NIE).

Each participant was given a three-part code to protect his/her identity. The first part begins with two letters 'GR', which is an abbreviation for 'Group'. The second part is a single digit number of either '1' or '2'. When combined with the first part it reads 'GR1' or 'GR2' (meaning 'Group 1' or 'Group 2'). The third part is either a

single or double digit number enclosed in brackets. This represents the individual participant's identification code. Thus the combination of all three parts will identify the participants and their university in Singapore.

The participants from NTU and NIE were identified with the acronym 'GR1' and labelled from GR1(1) to GR1(12). Participants from NUS were identified with the acronym 'GR2' and labelled from GR2(13) to GR2(20). The two replacements are identified with a '+' immediately after the number in the bracket they are replacing. If the participant's identification code is used before a citation there is no space or comma in between the two parts of the identification code. However, if the code is used after the citation or sentence then both parts will appear in the same bracket with the first part and second part separated with a comma and a space. Using an example of the first participant from NTU, the format of the code will appear as either 'GR1(1)' or '(GR1, 1)' respectively. More details of the participants are located in Appendix 'F'.

5.2 Category: Push Factors

The "Push Factors" category consists of five concepts which are labelled as: (1) Limitations on Admissions; (2) Limitations of Teaching and Learning; (3) Limitations of Research; (4) Limitations of Education Reform and (5) Limitations of Chinese Culture.

"Push Factor" refers to the circumstances within Mainland China that tend to compel many university students to seek an education overseas. These are represented by the five concepts above and their accompanying limitations. Each of these concepts will be briefly explained in this section and how each of them is linked to the "Push Factors" category. A full discussion on each of the concepts will follow in later sections.

Limitations on admissions refers to Mainland China universities' admission criteria and the availability of places in its universities. The universities are classified as 'Elite', 'Top' and 'Normal' universities. This concept will also discuss the factors which can inhibit the chances of bright students getting into, or remaining, in the good universities in Mainland China. It will also discuss how these reasons, generated from

grounded data, contribute to the “Push Factors” for the participants to seek education overseas.

Limitations of Teaching and Learning relates mainly to the undergraduate classroom environment in Mainland China and how the system of teaching and learning compels participants to seek education overseas.

Limitations of Research relates mainly to the postgraduate ‘teaching and learning’ environment and differs from the undergraduate ‘teaching and learning’ environment because it requires far higher levels of funding, academic expertise and facilities. The discussion will show how the limitations in this area are one of the “Push Factors” leading participants to seek better education overseas.

Limitations of Education Reform discusses why, despite the decades of restructuring and investment by the Chinese government, participants still want to seek education overseas.

Limitations of Chinese Societal Culture relates to how Chinese culture contributes to the “Push Factors” for Mainland Chinese university students to seek education overseas. This concept is often not obvious or well-understood by people outside Mainland China, but it works as a powerful, albeit invisible, force for these students (See Appendix ‘I’ for a discussion on the problematic nature of defining culture).

The five concepts above are clustered into a single category called “Push Factors”; these account for Mainland Chinese university students’ desire to seek education overseas. The “Push Factors” category forms part of the theory of ‘Selective Pragmatism’ which consists of three other distinct categories and their supporting concepts. The categories, concepts and the whole process are presented in Table 3. A full discussion of the “Push Factors” category follows immediately after the diagram.

Table 3

The Categories, Concepts and Processes of ‘Selective Pragmatism’

Categories	Concepts	Description of processes
Push Factors	Limitations on Admissions	Discusses the Mainland Chinese universities’ admission criteria and its limitations.
	Limitations of Teaching and Learning	Discusses the teaching and learning in Mainland China and its limitations.
	Limitations of Research	Discusses the research environment and its limitations in Mainland China.
	Limitations of Education reform	Discusses the many improvements as well as limitations of the education reform.
	Limitations Societal culture	Discusses the force of Chinese culture and how it contributes to the Push Factor.
Pull Factors - Other Countries other than Singapore	General Pull	Discusses the participants’ general views on overseas university education. The participants’ positive opinions of education overseas lay the groundwork that builds up the “Pull Factors” category.
	Specific Pull	Discusses the specific attraction or ‘magnetic force’ a country exerts on them for them to want to go to a particular country.
Pull Factors – Specifically Singapore only	Value of Cost	Discusses the participants’ cost of living and cost of education against the quality education and other benefits they received in Singapore.
	Value of Quality	Discusses the long-term benefits that the participants will enjoy from their quality education in Singapore.
	Value of Culture	Discusses the importance of language, the way of life in Singapore, the social system and its long-term benefits for the participants.
Individual Resilience	Adaptation to New Teaching & Learning Environment	Discusses participants’ experience of education in Singapore as they have experienced it and how they cope with the difficulties, if any.
	Adaptation to New living environment	Discusses participants’ experience of living in Singapore as they have experienced it and how they cope with the difficulties, if any.
	Adaptation to Social Culture	Discusses participants’ experience of social interaction with others in Singapore as they have experienced it and how they cope with the difficulties, if any.
Future Intentions	Return to homeland; Migrate to 3 rd country and Remain in Singapore.	Discusses the long-term view of participants on Singapore.

The above diagram shows the Categories, Concepts and Processes of ‘Selective Pragmatism’ in the development of the theory in this thesis. Figure 15 (Page 81) shows the link between the concepts comprising the “Push Factors” category illustrated in Figure 20 followed by the discussion.

5.2.1 *Limitations on Admissions*

The admission criteria for entry to universities in Mainland China is mainly based on the aggregate score attained by the high school graduates from their annual National College Entrance Examination or *Gao Kao* (高考) as it is known in Mainland China. The level of score is set by the respective universities, which GR1(9+) says “may range from a low score of 250 by less popular universities to about 650 by *elite* universities, such as Beijing University (Beida; 北京大学) and Tsinghua University (Tsinghua; 清华大学).” Apart from the *Gao Kao* score, special considerations may also be made for students who have special talents, such as those who excel in sports or academic competitions at national or international level. In exceptional circumstances, students who do not meet the usual entry requirements may still be able to gain admission if their parents are able to influence the authorities by way of a special relationship with the authorities or *Guanxi* (关系). This concept will be further discussed in later sections.

According to GR1(4), the best universities in Mainland China are Beida, Tsinghua, Nanjing University (南京大学) and Zhejiang University (浙江大学). Although the definition of ‘Top’ universities was not always a straightforward matter, there was broad consensus among the participants that Beida and Tsinghua were the *elite* universities or the ‘cream’ of the top universities in the country (GR2, 18). Admission to these institutions is therefore said to be the most difficult, especially for those who live outside the cities where these universities are located.

As GR1(2) says: “In my *Henan* Province (河南省) only 80 students get into Tsinghua University out of about 600,000 students.” Graduates of these universities enjoy many privileges and almost certainly a lucrative job after graduation (GR1, 9+). As the two *elite* universities have limited places, many will seek places in other ‘Top’ universities, such as Fudan University (复旦大学), Nanjing University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University (上海交通大学), China University of Science & Technology (中国科技大学), Zhejiang University (浙江大学) and Jilin University (吉林大学), all of which were ranked favourably either by The Times Education Supplement (2005) and/or the

Institute of Higher Education, Shanghai Jiaotong University (2005). Again, competition for places is intense. As GR2(19), a native of Jiangsu Province (江苏省), also says:

“there were 500,000 people in my province competing for places in the university.”

Many inevitably have to join the so-called ‘Normal’ universities.

The reputation of ‘Normal’ (otherwise called ‘Third Class’) universities is said to be very low. It is easy to gain admission to such universities, but they are “no good and not well recognized” (GR1, 1). As GR2(16) explains: “In terms of quality education there is a vast difference between city and countryside. In the city it may be very good, but in the countryside it can be very bad.” The graduates of such universities often find it difficult to gain employment (GR1, 7). Since the pool of graduates is now much larger, the employment market is also more competitive (GR2, 17+).

It is worth noting at this point that the ‘Danwei’ system in China – administrative units which control major decisions of their residents, such as health, housing and work – also determine whether residents gain admission to the universities of their choice. As Calhoun (1994, p. 274) explains:

‘Danweis’ are a central building block of social organisation in communist China and the principal locus of official identity (an ID card presents an individual as a member of a ‘Danwei’).

This system means that residents living in the same city where the universities are located will be given higher priority than non-residents for admission to the universities. GR1(5), who is a non-resident of Beijing, says he would need to have at least a score of almost 700 to qualify for entry into Beida compared to the residents of Beijing who probably need only a score of about 600.

5.2.2 *Limitations of Teaching and Learning*

The problems discussed above explain the frustrations and disappointments that participants experienced throughout their education. This is where the *in-vivo* code of

‘Pragmatism’ emerges, a term that is so endemic that it eventually formed part of the grounded theory of Selective Pragmatism.

Teaching and Learning, conducted in the Chinese language or *Putonghua* (普通话), are fraught with many limitations, such as (1) Lack of facilities and equipment; (2) Theory & Examinations; (3) Teacher-centred approaches and (4) Archaic syllabuses.

The lack of facilities and equipment in Mainland Chinese universities means that teaching and learning is heavily theory-based. The lack of resources is a problem for students who require practical, hands-on experience and equipment. GR2(19), a postgraduate student in Computer Programming at the NUS, explains that some of the modules he did at the National University of Singapore were not available in his university in Mainland China due to lack of resources. He pointed out that “these practical modules are very necessary when you work as a programmer.” The general consensus among participants is that “Chinese education is very theoretical and lacks the practical” GR2 (13), to the extent that “(teachers) don’t care what you need in the job market” GR2 (14). She attributed this to the lecturers ‘missing the link’ between foundation and practice. An emotional exposition was also made by GR2(18) as follows:

就是说，在更多情况下，是只注重在一种生存，不是一种技能上的培养。而忽略了学生各个方面的，就是说，包括这个学生的个性和品德的培养这些问题，嗯，我觉得在中国整个教育系统里面被忽略的很厉害。

[Translation by Ron Lim is confirmed by participant.]

[That is to say, in a wider context, it emphasizes only a kind of existence, not a training of a particular skill. And it neglects the individuality of each student, that is to say, these problems of each student’s personality and moral character, hmm... I feel that they have been greatly neglected by China’s entire educational system.]

GR2(14) sums up the weaknesses of the education system as not being ‘pragmatic’, a word that was captured as an *in-vivo* code that would resurface throughout the study.

The lack of practical lessons and pragmatism (that is, what is needed and is useful) is accompanied by a single-minded focus on the passing of examinations. (GR1, 5). While Chinese teachers are committed and well-intentioned, they are only intent on “putting everything into students’ brains” while “other things, like the practical, are being ignored” (GR1, 13). As a result of such rote learning, students are not encouraged to think creatively or to be self-reliant (GR1, 12).

While the exam-based education system seems to be regarded negatively by all the participants, GR1(4) says that this is changing because the universities now select their students based on merit. The change of focus is necessitated by the fast-changing economic and political climate in the country. As GR2(15) explains: “In the past, it’s all about passing exams because the jobs are allocated by the government. But today, exams alone cannot help a student find a job in a multi-national company (MNC).” Unlike the ‘Danwei’ system where jobs were guaranteed by the government (Calhoun 1994), MNCs require graduates who can do more than pass exams. Specific skills are needed. These realities are forcing universities to change. However, change is hampered by limitations such as lack of funds, which in turn hinders change.

Another limitation in teaching is the use of ‘outdated syllabuses’ (GR1, 10). As mentioned earlier, the Chinese language is the medium of instruction throughout the country but most high-technology books are written in English. As GR1(6) says: “Our textbooks are in Chinese. By the time the latest books in French are translated into English and then to Chinese, it will be 5 years (too) late.”

5.2.3 *Limitations of Research*

The limitations of research are closely linked to the limitations in teaching and learning, except that it affects mainly postgraduate students amongst the participants in

the 'GR2' group. The research environment in Mainland China is severely restricted by one important factor – insufficient funding (GR2, 19).

Postgraduate research undoubtedly demands greater human and technical resources than undergraduate level work. Top universities require highly-qualified, well-paid academics and world-class facilities in order to perform optimally. Academics in China are so poorly paid that there is a popular saying in China: "You are as poor as a Professor" (GR1 (6)). A Professor's salary is only about Renminbi (RMB) 5,000 to RMB7,000 per month. The international exchange rate from RMB to One Singapore Dollar 'SGD' is RMB4.69 to SGD\$1.00 (Money, 2005).

GR2(16), a university lecturer in Mainland China said that he was paid about RMB1,500 per month [This participant chose to remain anonymous]. In addition, they would get an additional income of about RMB10,000 at the end of the year from other work assignments. Lodging and utilities are provided by the university for a nominal sum of RMB100 per month.

GR2(16) explains that poor pay as well as inadequate research facilities and equipment explain why the quality of Mainland Chinese professors lags behind those in Singapore universities. Lowly-paid academics and some of the best researchers in China flee to countries like the USA and UK which can afford their research (GR1, 9+). As GR1(6) explains: "Some good engineers prefer to work in a small company rather than the university because the institutions are too poor."

5.2.4 Limitations of Education Reform

Education reform in Mainland China has cost the government billions of RMB since former Vice Premier, Li Lanqing, of the State Council was put in charge of education reform in 1993 (Li, 2005, p. 3). Li Lanqing, the former vice premier of Mainland China states in his book, *Education for 1.3 billion people*, that total national funding for education reached 548 billion Yuan or RMB in 2002 (Li, 2005, pp. 24-25). This was a five-fold increase compared to funding figures for 1993 (Li, 2005).

While the participants all recognized that large sums of money have been spent by the government on education reform, they still felt that the system suffered from *insufficient funding, unequal distribution of funds and fund management problems*.

The problem of *insufficient funds* is largely attributed to the sheer number of educational institutions and the massive student population in Mainland China. Most schools get a tiny fraction of the available funding after the bulk has been given to the 'Elite' and 'Top' universities. As GR1(6) explains: "There are many schools in the country and after distribution, each school perhaps gets only a small amount." According to Xinhuanet (2001), there were a total of 784,716 schools of all levels in Mainland China in 1998. A quick calculation would thus show that each institution would probably get only about RMB322,000.

In the late 1990s, a five-year plan was introduced by The State Development Planning Commission to increase the number of university students to 16 million from an enrolment of about 11 million in 2000 (People's Daily, 2001), lending credence to GR1(8)'s observation that there is not enough money to support so many universities and the increasing number of university students.

Unequal distribution of funds is also a problem because the top national universities are given first priority. The amount of funding for universities was allocated on the basis of each university's reputation and, therefore, not all would get the same facilities or equipment (GR2, 13). The difference can be dramatic. A popular university like *Nankai University* (南开大学) may get only ten per cent of what is allotted to the famous Tsinghua University (GR2, 15). However, GR2(17+) is of the opinion that "most of the funding goes to the top twenty universities." Such a situation serves only to increase the disparity between the 'top' and 'normal' universities.

Fund Management seems to be a particularly difficult problem in the education sector. While the central government may disburse the funds, their management is often left to local institutions. In an adverse situation, even teachers' pay can be in arrears. The former vice-premier for education discovered this after assuming office (Li, 2005, pp. 30-31). What is worse is that large amounts of funds can be squandered by dishonest officials (GR1, 9+). One such case involved the embezzlement of education funds worth RMB25.6 million in *Huazhou City* (华州市) and another case

involved illegal loans and credits worth RMB6.9 million at the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (The Straits Times, p. A6, September 25, 2004). Fraudulent acts like these greatly hamper efforts at reform and negatively affect the 70 per cent of students living in the more economically backward rural areas (GR1, 1).

5.2.5 *Limitations of Chinese Societal Culture*

Chinese culture is highly complex in terms of how it influences individual and group behaviour (See Appendix 'I' for a discussion on the problematic nature of defining culture). It is not the intention of this thesis to delve into the complexities of this matter, but a general understanding is necessary for this study. The participants view the most important features of the Chinese societal culture as: (1) Guanxi; (2) Face (3) Position (4) Wealth and (5) Competition. This section will thus concentrate on how these five features contribute to the *Push Factors* category in this study.

Guanxi or social connections are so important that they act like a magic lubricant that eases any friction during social intercourse with others in Mainland China. It is often not the magnitude of one's problem, but one's *Guanxi* which determines whether a solution can be found. There have been many discussions on this issue of *Guanxi*, but a clear definition remains inconclusive (Leung, 1996). Two very experienced participants in this study provide useful insight into this concept. According to GR2(17+), *Guanxi* is more than just friendship. In the case of friendship, it may just be a cordial relationship between two or more people whose relationship does not go beyond the normal pleasantries or casual socialisation. It has little personal or economic benefits for both parties and it cannot help advance your career or business. In a *Guanxi* relationship, the party who is able to benefit another will be more than willing to do so because it usually involves pecuniary interest. While GR1(9+) agrees with the definition of *Guanxi*, he argues that there are two types of friendship. The first type of friendship is with 'Gentlemen'. The second type of friendship is with 'Inferior Men'. He explains the two types of friendship with a Chinese Idiom: '君子之

交淡如水 小人之交甜如蜜’. In English, it translates as: ‘The friendship of gentlemen is as plain as water. The friendship of inferior men is as sweet as honey’. He elaborates:

The friendship between gentlemen is pure. They may not even contact each other very often. There are no personal or economic benefits involved. They just help each other out when the other party is in trouble.

The friendship between inferior men, however, is the opposite. They appear to be very close to you in normal times. But when you are in trouble, they will not help you voluntarily, instead, they will ask for personal and economic benefits from you. [This is where *Guanxi* is very important].

However, GR1(9+) points out that ‘Gentleman Friendship’ is extremely rare. This brings us back to the importance of *Guanxi*.

In the case of admission to universities, for example, students who do not meet the entry requirement can still be admitted if the students’ parents have the *Guanxi* with the appropriate authorities in the university (GR1, 4). Conversely, students who have an aggregate score that is higher than the universities require may still not be able to gain admission simply because the students or their parents do not have any *Guanxi* with the authorities in the university. Things can become more complicated if the student does not live in the same city where the university is located. A student from the impoverished region of Guangxi, for example, was denied a place in one of the top universities in the country, although her aggregate score of 750 should have easily earned her a place (Leow, 2004). As GR2(16) says: “Ability without *Guanxi* is very difficult, you need both to succeed.”

Even at the postgraduate level, students would need to have *Guanxi* at every level in order to carry out a research project, publish papers or obtain research funding GR2(17+). Even after graduation, students would still need to have *Guanxi* to get to where they desire (GR2, 18). Similarly, it is easier to get a job simply by knowing someone in authority (GR1, 4). Clearly, the social power of this unique form of personal relationships – *Guanxi* – is necessary to achieve one's goals in Chinese society. The practice of *Guanxi* is deeply rooted and widespread in Chinese society. While the majority seem to have no choice but to tolerate it, others are frustrated at not being able to succeed without it. The world finally saw the explosion of these frustrations at the tragic unfolding of events at Tiananmen Square on 4 June, 1989 (Schell, 1990). While some of the students' demands, such as more democracy and spending on education, have been met over time, *Guanxi* remains very much alive today. Students who have no means to circumvent this system will seek alternatives to either further their education overseas or risk losing *face*.

As a concept, *Face* relates to an individual's or family's honour. It is not to be taken lightly when dealing with the Mainland Chinese because powerful emotions are involved. *Face* can result in either pride and prestige or dishonour and shame. The concept is not about who is right or wrong, or the winner taking all. It is about compromising to allow both parties to preserve their honour to maintain the harmony, even if one party is obviously at fault. If a student is successful in school, for example, the family concerned will feel pride and gain respect because the family's honour is held high in society. However, if the student fails in the examination then the whole family, as well as the student, will feel shame (GR2, 14). It is therefore not uncommon for the rich to send their children overseas for education because of *face* (GR1, 11). The less wealthy in China also want to send their children overseas and they actively seek out funding support for pragmatic reasons rather than to save or gain *face*. *Face*, however, remains a strong source of pride and honour for Mainland Chinese whose relatives study overseas, whether they are rich or poor. Interestingly, while *face* may be a critical component in Chinese societal culture, there are some who view money as more important than *face*.

Wealth is said to be everything in Mainland China. It is a common greeting amongst Chinese people to wish each other good fortune or prosperity. Former leader

Deng Xiaoping famously declared that ‘to be rich is glorious’ as he opened up the country to the outside world in 1976 (Merson, 1989). As GR1(9+) says: “Money is everything in China.” In education, students who do not meet the admission criteria of schools or universities can quite easily buy themselves into the institution with money. They can go overseas even if they can’t get into any of their institutions. Those who don’t have money are left with very few options. Money is an all important instrument that works similarly to *Guanxi*. While some have earlier argued that *face* is all important, there is also a sense that if one “has money, not having face is ok” (GR2, 16). It can even buy *Guanxi*, although one may not know the other person at all. As GR2(18) says: “Have money, have *Guanxi*.” However, GR2(16) argues that this may not always be the case because “you cannot buy top officials.” This shows that money alone has its limitations. However, at the individual level, the lack of it can mean that life can be very difficult.

Position is often related to one’s status or authority in society. This is again deeply rooted in Chinese culture since the days of Confucius where the scholars or the *elite* are distinguished from the common people. A scholar was a person who had mastered the moral philosophy via examination based on the four books related to the teaching of Confucius: -- (1) Analects of Confucius; (2) Mencius; (3) Great Learning and (4) Doctrine of the Mean. The system became more organised by 1500 when examinations became an essential part of students who wanted to gain prominence in imperial politics. The examinations were administered at the county, prefecture, province and capital levels. All successful candidates were awarded ‘degrees’, which came with a formal title that benefited the examinee. The number of successful candidates accounted for no more than 1 per cent of the empire’s adult population at any given time during the *Ming-Ch’ing* (明/清时代) China period (Peterson, 2002).

Those who failed the examinations were doomed to become minor functionaries (Elman, 2002). The *elite* are therefore highly respected and wield enormous power. Nothing much has changed in modern China, as far as *Positions* are concerned. This is reinforced by the fact that Mainland Chinese are very conscious of their positions in society, which are classified by William, Gabrenya & Kwang (1996, p. 133) as: (1) Scholars (2) Merchants; (3) Labourers and (4) Farmers. Although farmers enjoy high recognition during the Máo’s era, it is no longer the same today. It is believed in

Chinese society that a person will become a farmer for life if he/she does not succeed in the examinations by the age of 25 (Wu, 1996). In a competitive society, it is unbearable to be at the lower rungs of society. This fuels the quest for position or power. After all ‘if one has position or power, one has everything’ (GR2, 14).

Education is widely perceived as the means for attaining such power. Those who do not have the means and access to the privileged position, but have the ability to excel academically, will find overseas education an attractive option. As GR1(3) says: “In Singapore you don’t need *Guanxi* to succeed. In China you need more than ability to succeed.”

Respect from society is in relation to having *Guanxi*, *Face*, *Wealth* and/or *Position*. The above are some of the features of Chinese culture. They are all inter-related. For example, if one has wealth one has a lot of *face* in society, which means people look up to you or respect you. As GR1(8) says: “*Face* is like respect from others...” Similarly, if one has *Guanxi*, it can lead to the creation of wealth or even position. And if one has position or power, one has everything (GR2, 14).

The respect one gains from having education and/or wealth is inculcated into children at a young age. At the age of five, GR1(9+) learned from his parents that ‘people respect you if you are rich’. Foreign trained graduates enjoy respect when they return home after their studies (GR1, 9+). As GR1(5) says: “My social status will go up if I graduate from NTU.”

Competition is perhaps the compulsion generated from the amalgamation of the many features of Chinese culture discussed above. As GR2(14) says: “Competition relates to face, relations and positions. It leads to success in career.” Her many compatriots like GR2(13) and GR2(15) agree that the Chinese are very competitive and achievement-oriented. As GR1(8) says: “Chinese want to be the best.” It is therefore not surprising that competition is common and intense amongst students. This inevitably fuels the desire for better education overseas.

5.2.6 Summary of Push Factors Category

To summarise, there are compelling reasons for Mainland Chinese university students to seek education overseas. The slow pace of reform and complex social and economic factors all help to push Chinese students to seek an overseas education. These students feel dissatisfied that they are still not able to enjoy the ‘fruits’ of the country’s open-door policy, or simply because they or their families occupy the lower status of society. In the face of these options, the participants are able to exercise Selective Pragmatism by weighing the pros and cons of local and overseas education. However, those who choose to venture overseas do not see themselves as disloyal to the country, but simply pragmatic.

5.3 Category: “Pull Factors”

The earlier “Push Factors” category emphasised the many underlying reasons for Mainland Chinese university students seeking education overseas. That was a prelude to this section, the “Pull Factors” category, which focuses the findings regarding the first research (guiding) question as to why university students from Mainland China choose to study in Singapore as opposed to somewhere else.

The meaning of “Pull Factors” is the ‘magnetic force’ in countries outside Mainland China that attracts Mainland Chinese university students to study in their countries.

The “Pull Factors” category consists of two subcategories. The *first* sub-category is named “Pull Factors – Other Countries”. This part consists of two concepts which are labelled as: (1) General Pull and (2) Specific Pull. This is illustrated in Figure 21. It will end with a discussion that leads to the *second* sub-category which is named “Pull Factors – Specifically Singapore Only”. This part consists of three concepts which are labelled as: (1) Value of Cost; (2) Value of Quality and (3) Value of Culture. This is illustrated in Figure 23.

Each of these concepts in both sub-categories will be summarised in their respective sections. Each of them is linked to their respective sub-category which, in turn, links to the main “Pull Factors” category. A full discussion on each of the concepts will then be carried out in the later sections.

Brief summary of concepts in Pull Factors – Other Countries

The concept *General Pull* relates to the participants' general views on overseas university education. It will discuss how their perception is influenced by cultures and the circumstances in countries outside Mainland China. The participants' positive opinion of education overseas lays the groundwork that builds up the "Pull Factors" category.

The concept *Specific Pull* relates to the specific aspects of interest to the participants that provide the 'magnetic force' for them to want to go to a particular country. These attractions reinforce their perceptions of overseas education, which in turn motivates them to further their university education overseas.

Brief summary of concepts in Pull Factors – Specifically Singapore Only.

The concept *Value of Cost* relates to the many benefits that the participants will receive in relation to the relative lower cost of education in Singapore. The cost refers to the huge savings in course fees and living expenses as compared to the costs of living and studying in the U.S. or the U.K. The benefits refer to the quality of education and all that Singapore can offer. This concept is closely linked to the next concept of 'Value of Quality'.

The concept *Value of Quality* relates to the long-term benefits that the participants will enjoy from their quality education in Singapore, including their association with world-class universities in Singapore and the positive impact on their personal lives. The quality education in Singapore refers to the quality of academics, facilities and equipment, learning environment and international recognition. The combination of both issues in this concept represents the most important attraction to the participants.

The concept *Value of Culture* relates to the importance of language, the way of life in Singapore, the social system and its long-term benefits for the participants. The participants see the importance in the combination of the English language and Chinese

language as an invaluable part of their learning and adaptation in Singapore. The social system of meritocracy in Singapore is of great value to them because their success depends on their talents and not on any special relationship or ‘Guanxi’.

The above concepts are clustered into their respective sub-categories. The *first* sub-category deals with the participants’ perception of overseas education and the attractions that overseas education provides. It also discusses other countries, namely, the USA and UK that attracted them and why they chose Singapore over them. The *second* sub-category deals with the factors that make Singapore, rather than other Asian countries, the best alternative to the USA and UK. The two sub-categories in turn form into a single “Pull Factors” category, which represents all of the factors which attract Mainland Chinese university students to seek education overseas, in particular the USA, UK and Singapore. The “Pull Factors” category forms part of the theory of ‘Selective Pragmatism’ which consists of three other distinct categories and their respective concepts. The Categories, Concepts and the whole process is presented in Table 3. Figure 16 (Page 82) shows the link between the concepts to the first sub-category of “Pull Factors” category illustrated in Figure 21 followed by the discussion.

5.3.1 Pull Factors – Other Countries

There are two sub-categories to the “Pull Factors” category. This section discusses the cluster of concepts relating to the *first* sub-categories, which are labelled: (1) Perception and (2) Attractions. The Perception concept relates to their initial opinions on overseas education; the Attractions concept relates to the specific ‘magnetic forces’ which lead Mainland Chinese students to view these countries favourably. This is followed by a short discussion on the outcome of their choices, and why they did not go to the country that they favoured most, including countries other than Singapore. The concepts in the first part of the category will now be discussed in detail.

5.3.1.1 General Pull

The opening-up of Mainland China to the international community by former paramount leader Deng Xiaopeng in 1976 resulted in a greater awareness that foreign universities were way ahead in terms of quality education, including research.

To ‘catch up’ with the developed world, the government sent university students overseas on government scholarships. Those whose families were wealthy also sent their children overseas for ‘better education’ (GR1, 6). Many returned to fill important positions in the public and private sector (GR1, 5), thus increasing public awareness of the great benefits of receiving an overseas education. While the local-trained university graduates are known as *Tu Bie* (土鳖), with a derogatory tone, those who returned with an overseas university degree were known more honourably as *Hai Gui* (海龟 (归)) or ‘Overseas-Trained-Graduates’ (GR2, 16). The status of *Hai Gui* carries with it lots of pride, prestige and honour for the students and their families. The reasons could mean the students were either very talented or were members of wealthy families who could afford an overseas education for their children (GR1, 2). More importantly, a *Hai Gui* is almost certain to have better job opportunities (GR2, 18) or, better still, a well-paid job in multi-national companies because companies prefer those with overseas experience (GR1, 10).

In addition, the participants also believed that overseas universities have better environments (GR1, 8); better facilities (GR1, 10) and higher living standards (GR2, 17+). All these add credence to the general perception that overseas education is superior in all ways. As GR1(9+) says: “Although top university students in Mainland China can learn a lot from universities in their own country, their perception is still that overseas universities are better.” Since the Chinese want only the best, it did not take long for the participants to say that the main attraction of overseas universities is simply that they are the best out there.

5.3.1.2 Specific Pull

The participants have no problem in knowing where to find the best education in the world. The ‘first-hand’ information brought home by the overseas-trained graduates and the information on the internet quickly gave them a sense of the choices available. Moreover, they easily discovered through published international rankings of universities which countries have the world’s best universities. The whole discussion on this issue quickly centred on the USA and UK, which host sixteen out of the world’s top twenty universities (Times Higher Supplement, 2005). As a result, student numbers to Britain have increased dramatically in recent years. According to Lee (2003), the British Ambassador to Beijing, Sir Christopher Hum, attributes the rise to the increasing numbers of wealthy Chinese families and the very high standards of British universities.

Many participants would have preferred to go to the USA or to Cambridge University or Oxford University, if they had had the chance to do so. Some were encouraged by their lecturers to study in the USA because they believed it offered the best general education (GR2, 15). Since the participants understand the ‘mark of a quality education’ (GR2, 13; GR2, 17) to lie in the quality of professors, facilities, equipment and other resources, they also understand that such a research environment is very costly and is likely to be found only in the rich countries, namely, the USA and UK. This is the reason why the best researchers from Mainland China have gone to the USA and UK (GR1, 9+).

While both the USA and UK garnered similar academic accolades from the participants, many favoured the USA because of the general perception that it is a ‘Land of Gold’ (GR1, 2). As GR2(17+) and GR1(9+) say: “The USA is the best in the world.” The “Chinese people have this American dream” says GR1(9+). Nothing seems to be able to shatter that dream, not even after the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was bombed in 1999 by NATO forces, resulting in three fatalities and twenty injured. Although the incident was reportedly caused by NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) forces, more than 700,000 Mainland Chinese students in many parts of China protested against the USA (Wong & Zheng, 1999). In response to the students’ ‘love-hate’ actions, GR1(9+) explains: “Students don’t care about political problems because it’s not about food.” Generally, students do not mix education with politics (GR1(12); GR2(15); GR2(18); GR2(19). While many simply don’t care, GR1(5) seems

to adopt a different strategy, when he says: “It is not the right time for China to do something [in relation to the bombing in Belgrade] against this country [USA]. We need to develop our economy now.” Perhaps the underlying reason rests with economics and pragmatism, as GR1(6) explains:

The reason why Chinese students still go to US in spite of the political problems is the same why Chinese still buy Japanese goods although they have committed more serious political problems. The reason is simply because it is better and valuable. The same goes for education.

The strong attractions of the USA and UK notwithstanding, participants were obliged to go elsewhere due to several obstacles. Many, for instance, were put off by the high cost and the difficulty in getting entry visas from the host country (GR2, 14; GR2, 19). Although GR2(14) was able to get a scholarship from a university in the USA, she was unable to get an entry visa from the USA immigration authorities. The Institute of International Education (IIE) attributed the tightening of visa procedures to the terrorist attacks in 2001 [at the World Trade Centre in New York, USA] (The Straits Times, p.3. November 4, 2003). Interestingly enough, participants were not put off by the difference in language and culture between these countries and their own.

Although the participants were aware of other good alternative universities in Asia which cost less and are easier to get visas for, they did not interest them either because of language problems (GR1, 4) or because the universities were not seen as famous (GR1, 6). As GR1(6) explains:

The Japanese don't teach in English. ...Most students will not go there. If you ask the students in Nanjing University or Tsinghua University, they view their university as much better than those in Thailand or Malaysia or Indonesia. So if I'm given the chance to go there, I won't go. Because I do not know of any good university in those countries.

Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned about going to other ‘English’ speaking countries earlier, apart from the USA and UK. Only one participant, GR1(5), revealed that it is common for students from his hometown to go to Australia, New Zealand and Canada. However, GR2(18) says the purpose is not always for quality education. According to GR1(9+), another motive could be simply to get a ‘Green Card’ or permanent resident status in the host country just so that they can gain pride, respect and everything when they return to their hometown in Mainland China. It is for these reasons that Canada is amongst the most favoured countries among Mainland Chinese.

In summary, the participants did not always take the easier or more logical route in their quest for the best education within their means. In particular, the self-sponsored students who could have saved large sums of money were not keen on the cheaper and easier route. They were obviously very pragmatic in their selection, which serves to explain the second part of the first research (guiding) question as to why they choose to study in Singapore ‘as opposed to elsewhere’.

5.3.2 Pull Factors – Specifically Singapore Only

The following discussion focuses on the perceptions Mainland Chinese university students had of Singapore institutions prior to their arrival which led to their decision to study in Singapore.

It is worth remembering that twenty-two participants were interviewed for this study. Three participants were self-sponsored, four were offered tuition grants and the rest were granted full scholarships. The difference in their sponsorship status does not change the focus of the first research (guiding) question on ‘why Mainland Chinese university students choose to study in Singapore? (As opposed to elsewhere)’ because the end result was that all of them chose to study in Singapore.

As explained earlier, there were two sub-categories to the “Pull Factors” category. This section will discuss the cluster of concepts relating to the *second* sub-category, which are labelled as: (1) The value placed on Cost; (2) The value placed on Quality and (3) The value placed on Culture. As a brief summary of the concepts for

this sub-category has been presented earlier, it will not be repeated here. Figure 17 (Page 82) shows the link between the concepts to the second sub-category of “Pull Factors” category illustrated in Figure 22 followed by the discussion.

5.3.2.1 The value placed on Cost

The offer of scholarships and tuition-grants by the authorities in Singapore plays a significant part in attracting many of the participants who otherwise could not have afforded it. However, funding support is not the main reason that brought the participants to Singapore, as will be explained later. The monetary costs of studying in Singapore are now discussed in detail.

Undergraduate participants who are on full scholarships need not pay course fees and are provided with free lodging in fully-furnished twin-sharing rooms for the same gender. In addition they will also get a monthly allowance of SGD500, which enables them to buy food, books and other necessities. The participants will only need to work in Singapore for six years and keep the earnings for themselves without returning any money to the sponsor (GR1, 7).

Those who are on tuition grants pay only about 20 per cent of the course fee. They can pay this fee in cash or finance it through a bank loan in Singapore. They are responsible for their own living expenses, which range between SGD500 to about SGD800 per month, excluding course fees. *Postgraduate participants* who are on full scholarships also need not pay the course fees and are provided with a monthly allowance of SGD1,500, which enables them to pay for their food, lodgings and miscellaneous expenses. Like the undergraduate scholars, they will remain to work in Singapore for six years and keep all earnings for themselves (GR2, 20). The postgraduate students are provided with fully-furnished apartments, about four km away from the campus. There are others who prefer to stay nearer to the campus, and they may pay about SGD280 per person for a fully-furnished, twin-sharing room (GR2, 18).

The above shows clearly that the scholarships and tuition grants are indeed attractive. GR1(9+) who had the opportunity to study in the USA, chose to study at the

NTU in Singapore because one of the key factors was the much lower costs compared to what he would have to pay to universities in the USA or UK, which he estimates would cost him about RMB1.3 million. Another participant, GR2(14), too, found the overall cost in Singapore relatively low. She relates that some of her classmates who went to colleges in the UK had to spend 30 hours per month doing part-time work so as to pay for their high cost of education. In contrast, she did not need to work because the cost of living in Singapore is low. While low costs are an important attraction, however, it is the international status of the university which the postgraduate as well as the undergraduate participants saw as the mark of a quality university (GR1, 6). The 'value' is therefore closely linked to all the participants' positive perceptions on overseas education in the USA and UK. Since they have no opportunity to go there because of high cost and entry permit problems, they are of the view that they can get quality education in Singapore – the next best alternative -- at a much lower cost regardless of whether they were sponsored or not. Incidentally, this concept is an offshoot of all that the participants have revealed in the other following concepts.

5.3.2.2 The value placed on Quality

Quality in this instance refers to the international reputation of the institutions, academics, facilities, equipment and its long-term worth. The combination of all these was the primary consideration for the participants' decision to study in Singapore. Since they only wanted the best, a combination of factors had to be in place for them to come to Singapore. They were also not deluded by university rankings in league tables, believing that the 'statistics' fail to take into account how poor the facilities are even in the best Chinese universities, compared to what Singapore institutions offer: As GR1(9+) explains:

The facilities in NUS are world class. Although the Chinese university was ranked seventeenth and NUS eighteenth, the Chinese university still cannot compare with NUS in terms of facilities; like hostels, classrooms, lecturers and theatres. Also NUS engineering is ranked top 5 in the world.

As mentioned earlier, most participants were either from the *elite* or top universities in Mainland China or could have qualified for one if they had not come to Singapore. GR2(14) says that although she considers Beida the best university offering the course she took, she still chose to study in Singapore because the universities in Singapore enjoy very high rankings, especially in the Asia-Pacific. She considers her faculty at NUS as among the best in the world. Had she gone to the USA or UK, she says, she may not have gained entry into the top universities. Gaining entry into one of the top 10 or 20 U.S. or U.K. universities would not have been good enough either, so she was happy to come to Singapore. Interestingly, her decision to study in Singapore was mooted and encouraged by her lecturer from Mainland China. Similarly, GR2(15), a graduate from a top university in Mainland China, says: “My Supervisor in China did not encourage me to go to Tsinghua or Beida, but to Singapore because NUS has better quality.” Her compatriot, GR2(17+) says that his current university in Singapore is better than Tsinghua University or Beida.

Another postgraduate student in NUS, GR2(13), says:

My supervisor encouraged me to come here because Singapore is more international. China’s top universities still have to catch up with the West academically in business or economic discipline. In terms of research, Singapore is better than the top universities in China and the better opportunities to interact with the pioneer researchers.

GR2(16), a Mainland Chinese lecturer, also echoes the view that Singapore universities are better than the elite universities in China:

I decided to come [to Singapore] because here [Singapore] is better. The facilities are better than the universities in China. Many of my [Mainland] Chinese university friends [in Singapore] also agreed. Although Beida is better in [the course I’m taking], I’m much better here because China has many problems. [The name of the faculty both in Singapore and Mainland China is not indicated at participant’s request].

While other participants' agreed that the universities in Singapore are better than those in Mainland China, it is not to be construed that the students and academics in the *elite* universities are inferior to those in Singapore. However, Mainland Chinese university students who graduate from a university in Singapore will have an advantage over their counterparts, as GR2(17+) explains:

...it does not necessarily mean the [Singaporean] students are better because Chinese population is so large... there are many talented people so their ability may not necessarily be inferior to those who graduate from Singapore. But I have the advantage of international experience. So I can still be considered better than the students from the best universities in China.

This explains the importance of quality that the participants place on the universities. It is the many benefits that they can enjoy from being associated with quality universities in Singapore. The participants were in unison with GR2(16) who states, "When I return with an NUS degree, I will be considered better than *Tu Bie*." This is also because participants felt that their social status will increase with a degree from universities in Singapore. As GR1(6) says: "When I graduate from NTU, it will raise my social status when I return to China." Other participants agree that a degree from Singapore will increase their job prospects (GR1, 3; GR2, 20). This is what the value placed on University quality is all about – higher social status and better job prospects. In a cultural sense, it is associated with *face*, *pride*, *position* and *wealth*, which were mentioned earlier as the important features of Mainland Chinese culture.

5.3.2.3 The value placed on Culture

The participants, in comparing Singapore with other countries, also took into consideration the important similarities of culture relating to *Race*, *Language* and the *Social System* of the island nation.

Although Singapore is a multi-racial country, the Singapore Chinese form about 70% of the total population of about four million. The predominantly Chinese society and its culture attract students like GR1(9+). Similar race and culture also mean a sharing of the Chinese language and many similarities in traditions and food.

The edge to Singapore is that the English language is the island nation's 'working' language, which was wisely retained by the Singapore government after the state became fully independent in 1965. The advantage of having both the Chinese and English language offers Mainland Chinese university students the best of both worlds GR1(7). The participants view the English language in Singapore as a significant contribution to their decision to choose Singapore against other countries (GR1, 4). It is for this reason that students do not go to Japan, because they don't teach in English (GR1, 6), notwithstanding the fact that Tokyo University in Japan was ranked higher than the universities in Singapore (Times Higher Education Supplement, 2005). Another advantage the participants felt was that they were able to express themselves in Chinese on or off of campus (GR2, 19).

Although race and language were not a major consideration in their earlier choice of the USA and UK, it became an important consideration when comparing Singapore against other countries in Asia and the region. Cost, on the other hand, became much less important when it came to choosing between Singapore and other Asian universities. The quality of the universities became paramount (GR1, 6).

5.3.3 *Summary of the Pull Factors Category*

To summarise, Mainland Chinese university students compete intensely to get into the best universities in Mainland China. If they fail to do so, their dream is to study at the best universities in the world -- the USA and UK. However, in view of the high costs and problems of getting entry visas from these two host countries, the participants chose the next best alternative – Singapore. Their choice of Singapore and their

revelation of what attracted them to this island nation is one of selective pragmatism. Although top universities in Japan are ranked higher than Singapore in the international ranking of world's best universities, they choose not to go there because of language. There were also other universities which were less costly in Asia and yet they still choose Singapore, which is relatively more expensive than those in the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) countries, because they were deemed to be inferior compared to their *elite* or Top Mainland universities. They wanted the best, but they are also selectively pragmatic.

5.4 Category Individual Resilience

In the earlier “Pull Factors” category, the perceptions of Mainland Chinese university students’ on overseas education were captured. The category also shows why they were attracted to the universities in Singapore. These findings relate to the first research (guiding) question on ‘Why do university students from Mainland China choose to study in Singapore? (As opposed to elsewhere)’. The earlier discussion was based on participants’ views having just left Mainland China for Singapore. In contrast, this section will discuss the reality of their experiences in Singapore after living there for some months and how they coped with their new environment both on and off the campus. It was through the revelation of their experiences in Singapore that the category of “Individual Resilience” emerges.

The meaning of “Individual Resilience” is the way in which the participants adapt to their new teaching and learning, living and cultural environment. The category shows the participants’ character of flexibility, endurance, and perseverance in rising to the challenges they faced in Singapore. The result of the discussion constitutes the findings of the second (guiding) research question which is: ‘How do Mainland Chinese university students manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment?’

The “Individual Resilience” category consists of three concepts which are linked by the common theme ‘Adaptation’. The concepts are labelled as: (1) Adaptation to new teaching and learning environment; (2) Adaptation to new living environment

and (3) Adaptation to new cultural environment. Each of these concepts will be briefly explained in this section as will how each of them is linked to the “Individual Resilience” category. A full discussion on each of the concepts will then be carried out in the later sections.

The concept, *Adaptation to New Teaching and Learning Environment* relates to how the participants cope with their new education environment in Singapore. It discusses the problems they encounter with their lecturers and their frustrations in learning, and how they adapt to the difficulties.

The second concept, *Adaptation to New Living Environment* relates to how the participants cope with their new living environment in Singapore. It discusses the various problems relating to their place of residence and how they adapt to it.

The third concept, *Adaptation to New Cultural Environment* relates to how the participants cope with their new social environment in Singapore and the people around them. This includes interaction with people on campus and outside of the campus. The discussion focuses on the difficulties the participants experience and how they adapt to them.

The three concepts above are clustered into a single category called “Individual Resilience”, which represents all that contributes to ‘How Mainland Chinese university students manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment?’ The “Individual Resilience” category forms part of the theory of ‘Selective Pragmatism’ which consists of three other distinct categories. Each category is in turn supported by its respective concepts. The Categories, Concepts and the whole process is diagrammatically presented in Table 3. Figure 18 (Page 83) captures the link between the concepts of the “Individual Resilience” category.

5.4.1 Adaptation to New Teaching and Learning Environment

As explained earlier, the education system in Mainland China is mainly exam-focused and employs teacher-centred learning. In other words, teachers are the source of all information needed to pass examinations while students are mostly passive

consumers of this information. By contrast, students in Singapore are more self-reliant when it comes to formal learning. As GR2(16) states: “The most difficult [challenge] is when we have to create our own ideas.” Since GR2(16) was himself a university lecturer in Mainland China, the extent of the difficulties faced by participants in this area, therefore, cannot be exaggerated. As GR1(6) says “...we have to learn everything ourselves. Professors don’t teach everything. The textbook is thick and I do not know where to start.” The participants generally find themselves in a difficult situation whenever they encounter problems in their learning. GR2(13) explains: “The problem is we feel lonely when we have problems with our learning. Most of us feel this way. We don’t approach the lecturers because we should learn by ourselves.” The problem is compounded because “the lecturers do not always follow the textbook” (GR1, 8).

The transition from teacher-dependence to self-dependence meant the students had to do a lot more work outside their normal lectures. While the students may be very accustomed to long hours of study with standard texts, they were very uncomfortable when they have to spend long hours looking for additional texts themselves and work with minimal contact with their supervisors. As GR2(18) explains:

The thing I dislike most is the lack of communications between you [students] and the supervisors. They [supervisors] are always too busy to talk with you. Sometimes we cannot see [them] for a month. So we communicate by email. But some of the students cannot receive the advice of their supervisors. The supervisors are always flying out and they are too busy to take care of the students.

The high standard of education within the new student-centred learning environment proves to be difficult, “Even the senior [students] work quite hard...” GR1(2). Many participants, like GR1(9+) and GR2(20) concur that Mainland Chinese students generally find it difficult to adjust to the new student-centred learning culture in Singapore.

The severity of the new learning-centred environment was aggravated by the way the English language is spoken in Singapore. Even those proficient in English found many communication problems. Singapore’s English language, better known

locally as ‘Singlish’, is spoken with a mixture of mainly Indian, Malay and Chinese languages, which is peppered with various jargon, colloquialisms and accents of the different ethnic groups. The ‘strange’ accent and slang of ‘Singlish’ baffled the Mainland Chinese participants, in some cases for many months. This phenomenon has such a profound impact on some prospective Mainland Chinese students that they refuse to study in Singapore. They are put off by ‘Singlish’ because it does not help them to improve their English GR1(2). As GR1(11) states: “Singapore is not an absolute English speaking country.” However, the problem with ‘Singlish’ appears to cause more problems outside the ‘classroom’ than inside (GR1, 7). The most eloquent participant was perhaps GR2(14) who spoke very good English albeit with a slight musical tone. Although she got used to ‘Singlish’ after a few lessons, she still hated it whenever her fellow students used it. However she had no problems with Singaporean lecturers if they didn’t speak ‘Singlish’. Interestingly, she had no problem with lecturers from the USA and UK. It would appear that the ‘Singlish’ problem is more of a social problem than a teaching-related one. As GR1(7) explains: “Although in the lectures it is not a problem because they don’t use so much ‘Singlish’, I still cannot understand the social ‘Singlish’.”

The general opinion of the participants was that Singaporean lecturers were alright, as long as they did not speak ‘Singlish’. However, the Singaporean lecturers are supported by their international colleagues from Mainland China, Korea, South Asia, Europe and USA and although all of them speak English, their different accents are very different from what the participants are used to (GR1, 7).

The problem is exacerbated by lecturers and tutors from other nationalities, especially those with ‘Indian’ accents GR1(5). Some found their Korean and ‘Indian’ academics’ accents very strange and very different from what they had learnt in Mainland China GR2(15). The word ‘Indian’ is in inverted commas because it is not always clear to which nationalities of ‘Indians’ the participants were referring.

According to GR1(4): “The general opinion of [Mainland] Chinese and Malaysian students is that Singapore lecturers are ok, but not the ‘Indian’ tutors.” This is echoed by many participants from both groups as they found the ‘Indian’ accent the most difficult to understand GR1(3). Her compatriot GR1(4) found that her tutor from India takes too much time to explain a simple question. GR2(17+) found it difficult to

understand his lectures because it was conducted by academics from India. On a more serious note GR1(10) says: “Indian tutors don’t know their work.” The problem seems to be so critical that participants deliberately avoid courses that have ‘Indian’ lecturers (GR2, 18). Ironically, GR1(2) found both Mainland Chinese and ‘Indian’ lecturers’ accents difficult to understand although she had no problem with Singaporean Indian lecturers. While participants like GR2(15) and GR2(16) took two to three months to overcome the problem of ‘Singlish’, it took GR2(19) about six months to overcome the same. However, most have yet to overcome the ‘Indian’ accent although many of them had arrived since December 2003 and a few in July 2004. This would mean a period from about 9 months to 16 months.

The language problem, in turn, affects their expression and contribution in class. As GR1(2) explains: “I have not quite solved this [language] problem yet because I can’t express myself as well as I want. So I just keep quiet in the class. But actually, I’m very talkative in China.” Similarly for GR2(17), he could understand the lectures, if they were not in ‘Singlish’. Although the participants may face language or expression problems, it does not affect those who are doing engineering courses GR1(4). Clearly, therefore, problems of language and expression affect the quality and quantity of participants’ social interaction with others in Singapore, a topic that will be discussed in chapter five.

The problem seems insurmountable, and yet the participants largely overcome it in their first semester through sheer individual resilience. According to the diary submitted by the participants on their daily activities, each participant spent an average of about 3.5 hours daily on lectures and tutorials from Mondays to Fridays and another 5 hours on private study daily, including weekends. That is a total monthly average of about 150 hours spent on self-study. The need to study for long hours on their own was to overcome their shortcomings during lectures and tutorials. As GR1(5) says:

I will try to overcome the problem by concentrating on the lecture for that hour and then I will read my notes or textbook. I don’t ask them questions, I usually discuss with my classmates. I seldom ask my tutors for help because there is no time to ask because there are too many students asking questions.

Other participants - GR1(3), GR2(19) and GR2(13) - would simply bring their lecture notes back to study them by themselves, either in the library, study-area or hostels. Although they would get together for group discussions occasionally because of project requirements, they still mostly studied on their own (GR1, 1). As to why they prefer to do that, GR1(2) says it is better for her to study alone because even if she had problems her friends also were unable to help her. The participants' display of individualism in long hours of solitary study is deeply entrenched in the way they have studied since their junior and senior high school days in Mainland China. As GR1(4) explains about schooling in China:

I went to school at 7.00am. and class starts at 8.00am. It ends at 4.30pm, but we have to [self] study until 9.50pm. There are 10 minute breaks after each class. Lunch break is about 1-2 hours. There are 5 classes a day with 3 classes in the morning. Each class is about 45 minutes. On Saturday we finish [class] in the afternoon. We had 4-5 hours of self-study in the class or sometimes in the library. Although there are no teachers around we still have to remain in class and do the questions on our own. This is compulsory.

The sheer number of students in Chinese universities meant that classrooms, instead of the library, tended to be used for studying on one's own. As GR1(1) explains:

As the universities are usually over-crowded the self-study rooms are usually occupied. Their only alternative is to use their hostel which usually is not as conducive as the classroom.

In Chinese universities, studying on one's own involves no discussion or communication with others. Every student is supposed to study in silence at their own

place in class. Students exhibit the same behaviour in Singapore, spending long hours in solitary study. This is what Mainland Chinese students are famous for. As GR2(14) says: “Chinese are quite diligent in their study. All my classmates [in Mainland China] will devote all their time, whatever spare time to study.” Her compatriots, GR1(1), GR2(15); GR2(16) and GR2(20) did exactly just that as they spent almost all their time studying except when they are ‘eating or sleeping’. GR2(20) says he will continue to study in his hostel even when he gets home late at night. It is routine for him to study way past midnight, including weekends. It is therefore not uncommon for Mainland Chinese university students to attend lectures fully prepared. Some are so well prepared that they found some lectures boring because they already knew the content before even the lecture begins (GR1, 1). All this effort is made so that, as GR1(1) says, the individual can be ‘Chu Ren Tou Di’ or ‘To be ahead of the herd’. This appears to be Chinese culture in action – ‘To be the best’, spurred on by ‘competition’.

The manner in which the participants overcame their difficulties with English is all the more remarkable given the fact that most of them only started learning the alphabet in their first year in ‘junior middle’ school (GR1, 3), roughly equivalent to the first three years of secondary education in Singapore. Senior middle school is similar to the combination of the fourth year of secondary education and two years of college in Singapore. Senior middle school is sometimes referred to as ‘high school’ in Mainland China.

The English lessons were conducted five days a week and each lesson lasted between one and two hours (GR1, 2). The focus is mainly on reading, which is the most important, followed by writing and listening with very little on oral practice (GR1, 2). In comparison, the majority of Singaporean students learn to read, write and speak English from their first day in a child-care centre, kindergarten or Primary One. These differences in the English language learning experience between the participants and Singaporean students only sharpen the concept of the individual resilience of the participants. Many do not only overcome the odds; they actually improve their learning and social skills in Singapore. The first obvious improvement was the command of the English language (GR1, 1; GR1, 3; GR1, 7; GR1, 12; GR2, 19). All full-scholarship participants from NTU found their 3 to 6 months of training with NIE a great help in coping with the language problems when they commence their degree programmes

(GR1, 1; GR1, 7; GR1, 11). The participants' general improvements of English in turn helps to improve their learning in other areas, such as problem-solving and manipulating ideas (GR1, 3); interaction skills (GR1, 2); theory and practical skills (GR1, 5); better creativity (GR1, 6); social skills (GR1, 8); better learning skills (GR1, 11); professional experience (GR2, 14); better knowledge in economics (GR2, 15); thinking skills (GR1, 9+) and time management skills (GR2, 17+). The all-round improvement is clearly shown in GR1(6) who was asked to lead a group of 80 students in a software development project. The initial anxiety of exams has all but evaporated (GR1, 7).

In summary, it is clear that the participants have overcome the odds in spite of their difficulties in adapting to the new student-centred learning environment, made more difficult by their language and expression difficulties. Their tenacity in pursuit of their academic excellence in Singapore clearly shows their individual resilience in coping with their initial difficulties in a new teaching and learning environment in Singapore.

5.4.2 Adaptation to New Living Environment

The participants from NTU live in a hostel on campus and those from NUS live in private condominiums that are located about four kilometres away from the campus. The living environment and amenities in both sets of accommodation would be a luxury to most Singaporeans. Yet it is not without problems. In this regard, the discussion will be divided into three parts. They are: (1) Amenities at NTU hostels; (2) Amenities at NUS hostels and (3) Living conditions at the hostels.

5.4.2.1 Amenities at NTU hostels

The participants from NTU were all housed within the lush compound of the university. The amenities in the university include a supermarket, café, bookshop, unisex hair salon, computer shops, mail service post, internal and external bus services,

sports complex, 12 canteens and 2 cafés, medical centre and 15 Halls of residence. Each hall of residence has a capacity of about 600, and a computer room that is equipped with 8 networked personal computers. The low-rise buildings consist of gender-specific single or double rooms with communal showers and toilets. As GR1(5) states: “We have a television room, reading room, laundry room. We have all the necessities in the hostel.” In the hostel rooms, each resident is provided with a study table, chair, shelving, notice-board, bed and wardrobe. There are phone jack and Ethernet connection in each room which allow the residents to surf the internet anytime. Those who have their own laptop computers can surf the internet from their rooms or use the wireless internet network anywhere on the campus. Those without their own computers can still surf the internet using the computers at the nearby residents’ hall. The library is also equipped with about 100 computer terminals for use for long hours. As GR1(2) says:

In China I have no computer; whereas here I can use my own computer in the hostel to search for much information. I can’t do the same in China because too many people share one small room, so no place for computer.

The residents may dine at any of the twelve canteens and two cafés on campus. Those located within the halls are usually open daily till late evening. The canteen offers a wide variety of food, drinks and fruits. The hostels and campus grounds are patrolled around the clock by teams of security guards.

5.4.2.2 Amenities at NUS hostels

The participants from NUS were mainly housed in the high-rise private condominium outside the campus, made up of several apartment blocks with 24-hour security. Each unit is fully furnished and equipped with all the usual amenities. All units are equipped with telecommunication and internet services. As the participants from NUS are postgraduate students with a monthly allowance of SGD1,500 provided

by the university, they pay a nominal monthly rental fee of SGD300 per person in a twin-sharing room (GR2, 13). The condominium compound is surrounded by shopping centres and several food courts, which complements the amenities within the condominium. The participants from NUS have the best of both worlds because while they enjoy all the amenities on campus, they also enjoy whatever is available in and outside their expensive private residence. The participants living at the condominium use the public buses that go straight to campus. The bus services operate daily from 5.30am. to 12.00am. The timing may vary slightly depending on the route and day of the week.

5.4.2.3 Living conditions at the hostels

The discussion in this section will begin with the participants' living conditions at NTU followed by those in NUS. As the hostels of both universities are in different locations with different amenities, the name of the university will be indicated wherever appropriate to enhance the clarity of the discussion.

The participants at NTU find the hostel comfortable and some find it conducive for private study. As GR1(1) says: "I do self-study in my hostel room. I can study very well because my room is very cool. Everything is good there. I don't like the library because the air-con is too cold." Some even find the hostel too comfortable, preferring to study in the library instead. As GR1(3) says: "The hostel is like your home so it is too comfortable. So I prefer to stay [self-study] in the library." The hostel is "nice and clean" (GR1, 1). The living environment here is very good (GR1, 3). The hostel is well managed (GR1, 11). In comparing with the hostels in Mainland China, GR1(9+) says: "[The] living environment is good. We only have 2 people to share a room compared to 8 in China." The residents in the hostel do not have many restrictions except for the normal house rules. They are free to study or surf the internet through the night with no limits to the use of the facilities. As GR1(5) says: "I like the freedom in the hostel. There are no restrictions like what time we must turn off the light. I can manage what I like to do." Even the 'worst' hostel in NTU is still better than those in Mainland China GR1(10).

The participants from both universities were therefore full of praise for the accommodation they lived in. However, participants found some aspects of hostel life a

problem. Some of these were: (1) Noise; (2) Mosquitoes; (3) Distance and (4) Lack of social interaction. The hostel at NTU houses students from Singapore and many other nationalities, each with their own preferred styles of working and playing. While Mainland Chinese residents prefer to study or surf the internet, many Singaporean students prefer to play games, often into the early hours of the morning. The noise irritates other residents (GR1, 5). GR1(12) says: “Most of the local students are very friendly and they accept foreign students. We can be very good friends, but I don’t like them playing in the hostel even after 2am. - 3am.” The NUS hostel also had to contend with the noise pollution caused by traffic going in both directions on a nearby expressway, 24 hours a day. Although the noise lessens by midnight (GR2, 19), it is still bad enough to cause some participants sleepless nights (GR2, 20). Mosquitoes were also a problem at both hostels (GR1, 6; GR2, 16; GR2, 20).

Transport was also a problem for NUS participants. While the participants at NTU could choose to take a bus or walk to campus, the participants at NUS did not have this luxury because the NUS hostel for postgraduate students is located about four km away from the campus. The participants find it time consuming to travel to and from NUS campus everyday. The irregular bus service means that a 7-minute ride to campus may take over an hour each way, including waiting times and the walk to the lecture halls. Participants also have to make sure they don’t miss the last bus which leaves the campus at 12.00am. They find it very inconvenient having to keep an eye on the time because it interferes with their concentration.

Another problem relates to the minimal social interaction amongst the residents in the hostel. As GR1(3) says: “There is no social interaction amongst the students living in the hostel. Everyone just closes the door after they go into their rooms.” Some hostels have a good mix of foreign and local students, but some seem to have only foreign students (GR1, 11). The hostels also get quiet during weekends and holidays when local students go home. The Mainland Chinese students miss them and can find it lonely (GR1, 1). Other participants whose hostels are shared with local students may find them friendly, but yet do not have much contact with them because as GR1(3) says: “Perhaps our experiences are very different.” GR1(9+) explains that Mainland Chinese students also have a tendency to protect their own privacy and would not want to ‘open-up’ themselves freely to others. According to Gao (1991) this is a common

characteristics of Mainland Chinese who will not open up and tell another person their personal stories unless they are on intimate terms with that person. GR2(15) says she doesn't have many friends here. The initial period can be difficult for many because most do not have friends and would have to do everything themselves (GR1, 10).

Apart from these irritations and inconveniences, the participants were generally happy with their accommodation. As discussed below, these irritations eventually became a routine that the participants were able to adapt quickly to without too much trouble. This was clearly reflected in the diaries submitted by them.

Where noise pollution is concerned, GR2(14) says it is a matter of personality because if a person is able to concentrate, they will still be able to concentrate even with noise. GR2(16) concurs with this view when he says that he can still concentrate even when his classmates were watching television at the same time'. Nevertheless, it took about a week for other participants such as GR2(20) and GR2(19), both from NUS, to get used to the noise from the expressway. In order to further circumvent the problem they usually remain on campus till late in the evening. The mosquito problem was also solved by frequent fumigation of the hostel compound by the estate office. While GR1(6) and GR2(16) felt there were too many mosquitoes, GR2(20) says the problem has somehow been reduced.

The lack of social interaction within the living environment is not a new phenomenon to Mainland Chinese university students. This is a norm even amongst Mainland Chinese students themselves. According to GR1(9+), there are 3 categories of Mainland Chinese university students in NTU. They are classified as 'SM1', 'SM2' and 'SM3' students. 'SM' is an acronym for 'Senior Middle' (高级中学) which is similar to 'Senior High' schools (高级中学) in Mainland China. He further explains: 'SM1' (高一) students are from the first year of senior middle school in Mainland China. 'SM2' (高二) students are from the second year of senior middle school and 'SM3' (高三) are from the third year of senior middle school. Generally, 'SM1' and 'SM2' students usually continue their high school education in Singapore. Upon successful completion, they may proceed to do a bridging course at NIE before joining NTU, whereas 'SM3' students are usually admitted directly to the university. While all

3 groups of students may live in the same residence hall, they do not always socialise well. As the study has shown, they are individualistic by culture in terms of competitive study, while being a collectivist culture in terms of group and family in their social lives.

The classification of Mainland Chinese university students as ‘individualistic’ seems to be contrary to conventional research that defines the ‘Chinese’ as belonging to ‘collectivist society’. Although traditionally the Mainland Chinese are known as a collectivist people, that seems to apply more to their close family relationships (See Appendix ‘I’ for a discussion on the problematic nature of defining culture). In terms of the economic and educational aspects of their lives, they display very strong individual and competitive characteristics.

Their culture of *Guanxi* also means they do not socialise freely with others who are not within their ‘inner-circle’ of friends. They are conscious of their ‘SM’ status and those who are at the higher rungs of the academic ladder do not mix with those at the lower rungs, and vice-versa, whether it is in the hostels or other activities within the campus. As GR1(9+) explains:

Your social status is determined by your social circle of friends, people you mix with. Like me, I have friends in Tsinghua and Beida, therefore I go back to China I play and live with this kind of people and my social status is just higher than others. In China we call this ‘Wu Yi Lei Ju Ren Yi Chun Fen’. It is like same kind of people mixing with same kind of people. So high status people want to contact with high status people. [The English equivalent would be ‘Birds of the same feathers flock together’].

As we earlier learnt from GR1(3) the residents shut themselves in their rooms for the reason explained by GR1(9+). There is no difference whether the residence hall includes Mainland Chinese students or a mixture with other students. They simply don’t mix freely and any inconveniences due to the lack of interaction can easily be adapted after the passage of time. This however did not affect the NUS participants

because they often spent long hours on campus and returned to the hostel only late in the evenings. However, they did interact if there was an opportunity.

In summary, the problems that the participants have encountered appear to be minute compared to the overall comfort and convenience of their living conditions. If the worst is still considered better than what they have experienced in their own country, it is a clear indication that they are coping exceptionally well. The problems of noise and mosquitoes were initial problems that they managed to cope with over the passage of time. The participants were also able to cope with the lack of interaction in the hostel through their own individualistic and independent ways. Their resolute characters moulded by Chinese culture enabled them to cope with the problems in their new living environment within a short period of time. Even the worst affected participants managed the problems with relative ease.

5.4.3 Adaptation to Singapore's Culture

Hofstede (1980) states: "Culture is to a human collectivity what personality is to an individual... Culture determines the identity of a human group in the same way as personality determines the identity of an individual" (pp. 25-26). (See Appendix 'I' for a discussion on the problematic nature of defining culture).

Singapore's culture in this section therefore refers to the collective society in Singapore. It relates to how the participants adapt themselves into Singapore's culture.

The preceding section briefly mentioned the social behaviour of Mainland Chinese university students living in the hostels and the reasons why they do not interact much with others. This section now discusses how they interact with Singapore students on campus and society at large and how they adapt to their new social and cultural environment. This will be discussed in two parts. They are: (1) The social culture gap and (2) Cultural acclimatisation.

5.4.3.1 The Social Culture Gap

The concept of ‘Social Culture Gap’ is an *in-vivo* code used by a participant in describing the problems she encountered with Singapore’s society. The ‘Social Culture’ relates to the language spoken in Singapore and the Singaporean way of life. The ‘Gap’ is the cultural differences between Mainland Chinese university students and Singaporean, especially the students. The discussion will first focus on the participants’ experience with local students and then move on to include the Singapore society. It will be discussed in two different parts. They are: (1) Communication and (2) Interaction. *Communication* relates to the participants’ problem with language and expression. *Interaction* relates to the participants’ cooperation with local students. These two parts form the overall concept of the social culture gap.

Communication proves to be difficult for many participants in their attempts to relate to others because of language and expression problems. As stated earlier, the problems of language the participants encountered were mainly due to the different accents and the local slang used by academics of different nationalities, especially during lessons and the way English was spoken in Singapore. It was explained that the participants encountered difficulties only with selected lecturers and tutors who spoke ‘Singlish’, or English with strong Asian accents or slang, like those from Mainland China, Korea and India. The problem the participants encountered in class were quite similar to what they had encountered with the local students and Singapore’s society in general. As GR1(11) explains, her main difficulty in Singapore relates to language and culture. We will first deal with the language and then culture in the later part of the section. The problem of ‘Singlish’ seems to affect their confidence in expressing themselves thus inhibiting the participants attempt to blend in with Singaporeans, especially the students.

GR1(4) says: “I have problem[s] in communicating with local students because we cannot understand one another’s way of speaking English.” In support, GR1(7) says ‘Singlish’ is a problem to her in the social environment, but not in class because it is not commonly used during lessons. The problem with language greatly influences their confidence in expression. The gravity of this problem can be seen in the case of GR1(12) who perhaps is the only participant that who grew up learning English from his father, a university lecturer. He was given further training in the English language when he joined the junior middle school in Mainland China. Prior to joining NTU he

also went through a bridging course at NIE for about six months. His competency in the English language therefore cannot be doubted. He did not encounter any problems with language during lectures, but he did find ‘Singlish’ perplexing and this affects his expression outside lectures. It could therefore be argued that if the most competent participant finds it difficult, the rest would find it even more so. The difficulty in the way English is spoken in Singapore causes many participants to shy away from local students, simply because they could not express themselves (GR2, 17+). It is no wonder that GR2(14), who is very eloquent in English, simply hates ‘Singlish’ though she could understand it. There are others who could understand ‘Singlish’, but also found it difficult to express themselves. This in turn prevents them from blending in with local students. However ‘Singlish’ is not the only language problem the participants have encountered. They found the accents of students from other nationalities and ethnic backgrounds difficult as well, especially those of Malays and Indians. In a nutshell, GR1(5) says:

The main difficulty is the communication between the people from different countries, like those from India. It is always easier for us to communicate with [Singapore] Chinese or PRC students. Singapore students are quite ok. It is difficult for me to speak with Indian students. I only mix with Singapore students when there is ECA (Extra Curricular Activities). I have no problems with Singapore students. They are quite friendly. I like to talk with Singapore students on any topic.

In the same vein, GR2(13) says:

There is no problem with the Singapore people because they are generally very friendly. Another thing is we also do not have much chance to communicate with them. There is also ‘Singlish’ problem. Although there are many Singaporean Chinese, but you also have Malays and Indians and their accents are very strange to me.

In order to reinforce the point that the problem is the language and not with Singaporeans, GR2(14) says:

I think the main problem is the language. If Singaporeans can speak some Chinese then it is no problem, but I just cannot understand some Indians and Malays because their English I can hardly understand. I have to ask them to repeat again and again.

Another participant, GR2(18), was not affected by ‘Singlish’, but was so by the ‘Indian’ accent that it affected her expression during communication with them.

As mentioned earlier, the participants have no problem with Singaporeans, but with the ‘Singlish’ or the diverse accents of English language spoken by non-native English speakers. The discussion now turns to how the participants and the local students interact from the cultural perspective.

Interactions between the participants and the local students are fraught with many cultural differences. To begin with, there is actually very little interaction between the participants and local students. Mainland Chinese university students did not study with the local students because the latter do not go to the library after lectures (GR1, 4). This is similar to the observation of GR1(10) who states that there was very little interaction between local and foreign students. Although she has no problems with her Singapore friends, they just don’t mix very often. As most local students do not live in hostels, they too do not loiter around the campus after class. As GR2(15) says: “I don’t have much chance to mix with Singapore students because they have their own homes to go to after class. There are those who may mix, but they do not necessarily go out together.” This, GR1(8) says, had nothing to do with language because they were able to communicate in Chinese.

In other cases, the lack of interaction was also caused by differences in attitude towards the academic objective. GR1(2) explains:

Although they are friendly [referring to Singaporean students], we just cannot work together. All my friends have the same problem. We feel that they don’t work as

hard as us. They always wait till the last minute to prepare, but we always want to prepare before.

She adds that the difference in attitude had nothing to do with language or expression because this is not a concern in the engineering course. She says Singaporean students are just 'too relaxed'. Another participant GR1(8) shares the same sentiments as GR1(7):

Some Singaporean students don't study hard. I think that's the difference between the two cultures. Chinese students want to be the best students to achieve in the academic area. For Singaporeans they participate in various activities. They think study is just a pastime.

There were other participants like GR1(11) who saw it differently as she says Singaporean students work hard and play hard. Unfortunately, leisure activities may not interest both the participants and local students equally. GR1(12) explains: "There are also some cultural differences [with] local students. Sometimes when they organise activities I don't feel like joining because I don't find it interesting." In conversation, there is also no common topic to talk about. As GR1(1), who has no problem with 'Singlish' explains: "My only problem with Singapore students is we do not have a common topic to talk. What they know I don't. What I know they don't." According to the participants, it is not always that they do not want to interact with local students, but because of the many differences that kept them apart. GR1(2) passionately explains:

I cannot communicate very well with Singaporeans... I have to make friends with Singaporeans, [but] it is quite difficult because we don't have much in common and also we don't understand them and they don't understand us very well. There is no common interest. I try to make friends with Singapore students, but not successful because our thinking is different because they are more outgoing. We have different way of speaking Chinese so sometimes we don't understand one another although Singapore students are very friendly.

At the NUS, the situation is less tense. GR2(15) relates she had 20 students in her class. There are 10 students from Mainland China, about 4-5 from Singapore and the rest from India, Vietnam, Philippines and USA. The nature of their study requires them to interact frequently in class discussions. Initially there were some difficulties and language barriers, but she managed to overcome it through constant interaction with them. As she says: “When I speak with them I feel that I’m practicing my English. Now I enjoy chatting with them.” Another postgraduate participant, GR2(19) experienced overall improvement in his English and study. He had also made many friends from Singapore and other countries.

The above shows that the problem of a cultural gap affects the participants’ expression and their attempts to interact with local students on campus, to a varying degree. A discussion on cultures from a different perspective continues in the next section, looking at how Mainland Chinese students blend into Singapore’s society, a different cultural environment.

5.4.3.2 Cultural Acclimatisation

Cultural here relates to the social environment, in particular the Singaporean society. This generally refers to: (1) Language; (2) People and (3) Food.

Acclimatisation relates to how the participants cope with Singapore’s culture.

In the earlier section, the social culture gap between the participants and Singaporean students was discussed. This section focuses on their attempts to adapt to Singapore’s society. The discussion begins with the difficulties participants had experienced and how they coped with them.

The process of cultural acclimatisation with Singapore’s society has many similarities with the issue of language and expression. The participants’ general opinion about Singaporeans is that they are very friendly, kind and polite, but they still encounter difficulties in communication with the different races in society. While most Chinese in Singapore are bi-lingual in the Chinese language and English the same

cannot be said of the Indians and Malays, who speak mainly English with their own ethnic accent or dialect. As GR2(20) says, one can only speak English with the Indians, however, if Singaporeans can speak Chinese then it is alright. GR2(16) has no problem going shopping or interacting with Singaporean society because most of them are able to speak Chinese. However, he found it difficult to heed his lecturer's advice to practise English in public whenever he had the opportunity. He explains: "Sometimes it is quite difficult. Our lecturers want us to practise our English outside, [but] when we speak with the taxi drivers they get angry because they don't speak English." This is in reference to a small minority group in Singapore who speak only their own ethnic dialect. There is also a small minority group of Singaporean Indians and Malays who speak the Chinese language and other Chinese dialects. The language problem the participants encountered in society is easily overcome with the passage of time. Most of the participants had been in Singapore for nearly six months when interviewed. Almost all participants encountered the same problem with language during their initial period in Singapore (GR2, 17).

Like GR2(16), almost all the participants grew used to Singapore's society, including its cuisine. Culinary tastes within China vary widely, and the participants found it difficult initially to adapt to Singapore food, GR1(8) says: "Food is not as tasty as those from my hometown." Similarly, GR1(4) did not like the food initially, but is now used to it. As with the rest of the participants the food may not be palatable, but all eventually got used to it - urged on by hunger (GR2, 16).

In summary, the above shows that communication between the participants and local students was made difficult by the way English is spoken in Singapore. This was aggravated by the different accents of the various ethnic groups, including academics and students from other countries. The problem with language in turn affects their confidence to express themselves. The communication problem eventually affects their ability to interact with local students. This was also aggravated by the different attitudes towards the objective of study. While most of the younger participants from NTU find it a little more difficult to overcome the problem, the more mature participants from NUS were able to handle the difficulty with relative ease. In the final analysis, all the participants were able to cope with the problems in their own way. In the first instance, Mainland Chinese university students do not depend on local students

to help them to excel in their studies. The participants have proven that the great disparity in the exposure to English language is no barrier in their pursuit of academic excellence. The lack of communication or interaction with local students is not a new phenomenon; we have also learnt that Mainland Chinese university students do not necessarily interact amongst themselves because of their ‘status’ in the universities and their own culture of *Guanxi*. This study has also shown that all the participants are highly individualistic in their ways and by their own individual resilience and pragmatic ways they have managed to cope with the problems caused by the social culture gap, regardless of whether it is with students, society or food.

5.5 Category: Future Intentions

The “Individual Resilience” category has shown how the participants coped with the various problems they encountered in class, on campus, in hostels and in the Singapore society. The findings relate to the second research (guiding) question on - How do Mainland Chinese university students manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment? The discussion has also shown the reasons for Mainland Chinese university students seeking overseas education, how other countries attracted them and how they coped with their studies and living environment in their chosen country of study – Singapore. The findings from these three categories lead to the creation of the final category - Future Intentions, or the plans of the participants’ after they graduate from their universities in Singapore.

The “Future Intentions” category consists of three concepts which are linked by the common theme ‘Re’, which is the prefix to the concepts that are labelled as: (1) Re-main in Singapore; (2) Re-route to another country and (3) Re-turn to Mainland China. Each of these concepts will be explained briefly in this section as will how each of them is linked to the “Future Intentions” category. A full discussion on each of the concepts follows in later sections.

The concept, *Re-main in Singapore* relates to the participants’ decision whether to remain in Singapore after their graduation from the universities. It discusses the

reasons of their decisions and what Singapore can do to influence them to stay, if they were to think of leaving Singapore.

The concept, *Re-route to other countries* relates to the participants' decision to move on to another country, instead of staying in Singapore or returning to Mainland China. It discusses the reasons for their decision and what their plans are after they have achieved their objectives in the country they decide to move to.

The concept, *Re-turn to homeland* relates to the participants' decision to return to Mainland China after their graduation. It discusses the reasons for their decision and whether they will ever return to Singapore.

The three concepts above are clustered under a single category called "Future Intentions". It forms part of the theory of 'Selective Pragmatism' which consists of three other distinct categories. Each category is in turn supported by their respective concepts. The Categories, Concepts and the whole process is presented diagrammatically in Table 3. Figure 19 (Page 84) shows the link between the concepts to the "Individual Resilience" category followed by the discussion.

5.5.1 *Re-main in Singapore*

As stated earlier the Singapore institutions are not responsible for providing Mainland Chinese students with jobs (GR1, 3), although some scholarship and grant-holders are obliged to remain and work in Singapore after graduation as part of their contracts. In the event that they cannot find employment 6 months after graduation, they are free to leave. Most postgraduate scholarship holders do not have such obligations. However, there are exceptions to this general rule (GR2, 15). Those who are self-sponsored may remain in Singapore to seek employment. This discussion will therefore be based on whether they will continue to stay in Singapore upon their graduation or after they have fulfilled the terms of their scholarship or tuition-grant schemes. The results of the discussion provide an understanding of the participants' long-term view of Singapore. Since the Singapore labour market is generally short of highly qualified, technical and professional people, the chances of obtaining employment are quite high.

The participants' earlier positive perception of Singapore as a place for higher learning was reinforced by their positive experiences in Singapore. As to whether there is anything the universities in Singapore could do to improve, the response was typified by GR1(3) who stated: "It is good already." The common comments were steadfast that Singapore is the ideal place for quality education. They were generally pleased with their experience in Singapore notwithstanding the language problems that they had initially encountered in class, and the few irritations some had experienced in their living environment. On the whole, they considered Singapore worthy of their recommendation to friends and relatives who might wish to seek further education overseas (GR1, 7; GR1, 2; GR1(5)).

The many positive comments by the participants clearly show that they have coped well and are generally fond of Singapore, in particular the quality of education and the quality of living. However, there were mixed feelings on whether they will remain in Singapore permanently. The following discussion begins with the views of those who will remain in Singapore, and these are followed by the views of those who intend to leave.

The decision to remain in Singapore is determined by whether the participants are able to secure a good job with good incentives in addition to their comfort level. As GR1(3) realises, she must remain to work in Singapore for six years to fulfil the terms of her scholarship. She was confident that she will get a job because all her seniors have no problem with finding employment. As to whether she will remain in Singapore after that, she says it all depends on her comfort level in her job and her relationship with others. If she like it she will stay. Her sentiment is shared by many of her compatriots. A postgraduate participant, GR2(20), explains that though he is particularly impressed with the orderly and peaceful society in Singapore, he would not stay more than five years, including his two-year bond. After that, he would need to look after his parents and to seek better job opportunities in China. According to his plan, he would be about 30 years old and it would be time to start a family and settle down permanently in China. Another participant GR1(5) asserts: "If my career is going well, I will stay here because I have friends here already. If my career is not satisfactory then I will go back." As to why he prefers to remain in Singapore only if the condition is right, he says that it is easier to live in Singapore because in Mainland China you

need more than ability to succeed. This is in reference to the Chinese culture of *Guanxi*, discussed earlier. In addition, to a good career, some like GR1(7) would consider staying permanently if her parents were allowed to stay with her. However, she pointed out that it is still too early to say because by the time she completes her bond in Singapore she would have been in Singapore for 10 years, so circumstances might change. In addition to jobs and salaries, there were other participants who would remain to get more work-experience before moving on (GR1, 4; GR1, 6; GR2, 16; GR2, 18). The above participants typically represent those who are under the full-scholarship scheme who would consider staying, but with conditions.

The only participant from the full-scholarship scheme who has no conditions attached, but would consider staying in Singapore for a very long time is GR1(1). He is one of the only three participants whose families are known to be farmers. The two remaining participants who are under the tuition-grant scheme would also like to remain in Singapore, but for slightly different reasons. GR1(10) finds Singapore nice with beautiful universities, but would only stay if she has a good job with a high salary. She comes from Suzhou city, whose industrial park resembles Singapore in many ways. The many similarities were the results of the Singapore government's massive investment in the city that was once made up of mainly farmland. Hence, in the absence of the earlier mentioned two conditions there is really no incentive for her to stay. Her compatriot, GR1(8), is not too concerned about jobs and salary. Although he found Singapore too small he would not leave Singapore, at least for now, because as he said: "It is better here – simple." In the case of GR1(11), she plans to leave Singapore to further her studies in the USA or Europe and will return and remain in Singapore, if she can find a job. As to why she will return to Singapore, she says Singapore is good enough for her. It is worthy of note that she is one of the three who comes from a family of farmers. GR1(4) too will leave Singapore to gain some work experience, probably in the USA and then return to Singapore to stay, if she can find a good job.

The discussion so far has dealt with those who are under the full-scholarship and tuition-grant schemes and their reasons or conditions for remaining in Singapore. The discussion now turns to those who are 'self-sponsored' who would want to remain in Singapore either permanently or indefinitely. There were only two, out of three, in this category. GR2(19) would stay to work for few years after his graduation, but

would eventually return to Mainland China. GR2(17+), like GR1(1) and GR1(11), who comes from the rural part of Mainland China, may consider staying here permanently, if possible. As to why he would not return to his country, he says: “China is so undeveloped, so if we don’t leave the country, what good is there for us.” He went on to say that he will not be going anywhere for the next few years and hopefully will remain here as a permanent resident or take up citizenship. While many of his compatriots will stay with him in Singapore if their conditions are met, there are others who will not stay.

One participant, GR1(8), had earlier mentioned that Singapore is too small, but will remain in Singapore for some time before moving on to Australia to experience a different environment. The size of Singapore relates to the limitations as a place for leisure and self-development. It is the general opinion of the participants that the size of Singapore plays a significant part in influencing their decision not to remain permanently in Singapore. In terms of leisure, all of them have been around Singapore many times and simply could not find anything that would continue to interest them to stay on (GR1, 10). In terms of prospects, GR1(9+) says: “Whatever I want to do there is not enough market.” Hence, he says he will not remain in Singapore, regardless of what he is offered in Singapore. His determination to leave Singapore is shared by GR2(14) who explains that there is no reason for her to remain in Singapore as she said that even if she were to succeed in Singapore there was nobody to share her joy with. In the case of GR2(15) who is not bounded by the terms of her scholarship to remain in Singapore, she will thus return to her home country eventually.

The determination of many participants not to remain in Singapore permanently, and some not even temporarily, seem to lend support to the views of GR2(19), who states that Singapore is not a very large place. So even if they were to gain citizenship their chances of promotion remain very slim. In other words, there are no long-term prospects for them. According to him, this is a common worry amongst Mainland Chinese university students in Singapore. Perhaps GR2(14) sums up the long term perceptions of Mainland Chinese university students on Singapore, when she says: “Singapore is a good transition place for further education in another country or for jobs. It is quite good to come to Singapore and get a transitional study.”

5.5.2 *Re-route to other countries*

The concept of *re-routing* to other countries reminds us of the earlier detailed discussion on how Mainland Chinese university students were attracted to the USA and UK. Some participants had also expressed their desire to go to either of these countries. As GR2(16) says: “I have not heard of NUS students going back to China, but [rather] to the US.” However, in reality, this study has shown that only few participants will *re-route* to other countries and even then, they do not plan to stay permanently. The discussion in this section will thus focus on those participants who plan to *re-route* to other countries, especially to the USA and UK, and also their long term plans in these countries.

In earlier discussion, it was noted that some Mainland Chinese students plan to go to the USA for the many opportunities offered and some will go there for further education. In regards to opportunities, only one participant, GR1(4), intends to work there for about two years, but she plans not to remain there permanently. As for education, GR2(14) says: “I think I will go back to Beijing to work for 3 years and then maybe I will pursue a doctorate degree in the United States.” In the same path, GR1(9+) would also pursue his Masters in Accountancy in the USA after he graduates from Singapore. However, none of those featured in this section said they would migrate or remain permanently in either the USA or Europe. In fact, most participants see themselves returning to Mainland China after they have achieved their objectives overseas. Similarly, the number of participants who plan to *re-route* to other countries after they have fulfilled their obligations in Singapore is very few. Ironically, others like GR1(3) and GR1(6), who would have preferred to go to the USA will either remain in Singapore temporarily or return to China. Similarly, GR1(5) who had earlier preferred to go to Cambridge University or Oxford University in the UK will also not be going anywhere. Another participant, GR2(15) who was encouraged by her supervisor to further her studies in the USA will also not be going there.

The number of participants planning to *re-route* to other countries is indeed very few. The key reason is why they did not go there in the first place – cost.

In summary, it was earlier shown that some participants intend to remain in Singapore, if their conditions are met. Some plan to *re-route* to other countries either directly or indirectly from their home country. This discussion will now turn to the last group of participants – those who will return to Mainland China immediately after their graduation and those who will leave after they have fulfilled their obligations to their universities in Singapore.

5.5.3 *Re-turn to Mainland China*

The discussion has earlier shown why some Mainland Chinese university students plan to remain in Singapore and why some will leave. It was also shown that some intend to move on to another country, but will not stay for long. Some plan to return to Singapore at some point and some intend returning to Mainland China. The latter will be a subject for discussion in this section. It will begin with the perceptions of a collection of participants who will return home to Mainland China followed by the views of GR1(9+) and GR2(14) who perhaps sum up the reasons why so many participants intend heading home to their own country.

In most circumstances, many participants would have been in Singapore for many years by the time they complete their obligations to their universities in Singapore. Those who are under the tuition-grant scheme would have been in Singapore for 6 years, comprising 3 years of study in the universities and 3 years of work. Those who are under the full-scholarship scheme and are bonded to work in Singapore would have been in Singapore for 10 years. That is 4 years of study and 6 years of work. This assumes that they are able to find employment in Singapore. As GR1(7) says: “I think I will go back to China because by the time I finish my bond here I would have lived outside China for 10 years.” However, ‘SM1’ and ‘SM2’ students who are under the full-scholarship scheme may be here for a longer period. This is because they would have either spent some time studying at the secondary schools, junior colleges or NIE in Singapore. As stated earlier, not all of them under the full-scholarship scheme are required to work in Singapore (GR2, 13; GR2, 15; GR2, 16).

In a show of patriotism, GR2(13) said she would return to her country because she feels that her country needs her more. She also feels that Mainland China offers

greater opportunities than Singapore. As to why they will only work for few years in Singapore and then return to China, GR1(2) says: “Because I think China is the most promising country. It is difficult because I’m a Chinese. I want to contribute to my country.” There were others who would stay in Singapore longer, but ultimately the urge to return to their roots might prove irresistible. As GR2(18) says: “If I can find a job here maybe I will make this my home but when I get old, I will want to go back because [it is] my home-country.” It is clear that most participants will work in Singapore for a few years and then return to their country. In addition to having to work in Singapore there were also practical reasons to do so. As GR1(6) states:

I will work in Singapore for a few years to accumulate some experience and then return home. I will not stay here permanently nor anywhere else in the world because China is my home country. I will go back.

The reason ‘to gain some experience’ is not only a pragmatic decision, but also an integral part of their overall training in Singapore. Indeed, it was for this reason that they felt compelled to seek education overseas in the first instance. The indication so far is that most participants will return to Mainland China some day. Even if they may *re-route* to another country, they will still return to their home-country. As shown in the preceding section, all those featured will eventually return to Mainland China regardless of whether they are re-routing to study or for other purposes. As GR1(10) says “I may go somewhere, but I will go back to China.” Interestingly, GR2(16) who shared the view that NUS students tend not to return to China, but instead re-route to the USA is himself returning to China after he has worked in Singapore for a few years. The reason he gave is that Singapore’s hot and humid weather is not suitable for him. Many participants have said they will work in Singapore for a few years before returning to Mainland China. There is no certainty their plans will be carried out according to their desires. GR2(19), for instance, said that he would remain in Singapore to work for a few years but ended up leaving Singapore soon after completing his course in NUS.

There is little doubt that most participants will return to Mainland China eventually. This phenomenon is interesting because most have no plans to stay away from their country permanently. It is even more interesting that almost all of them no longer mentioned going to the USA or UK, the two countries which they were especially fond of originally. Similarly, all the nice things that they have said about Singapore do not seem to be compelling enough for them to remain permanently.

Perhaps the reasons lie with the revelation of the two participants featured as follows: GR1(9+) said earlier that he would move on to the USA to pursue his Masters degree after he had completed his studies in Singapore. He also said that he will not remain in Singapore no matter what. The reason was that Singapore is too small and whatever he wants to do, “there is not enough market.” In contrast, the USA is seen as a land of “gold and opportunities.” It is also host to many of the world’s best universities. In his opinion, “The USA is the best in the world.” It is therefore not surprising that he chose to pursue his Masters degree in the USA, but, surprisingly enough, he would neither migrate there nor anywhere else in the world. As he relates, Mainland China may not have a better system, but at least, it is a familiar system to him and one in which he believes he can be respected. In reinforcing this point, he pointed out that even in the best system [referring to the USA] no one cares even if you are at the top because no one will know you. If he succeeds in China, people around him will know and he will gain a lot of respect from them, especially if he returns with a U.S. degree. The desire for respect is so important that he, GR1(9+), managed to dissuade his parents from migrating to the USA.

GR2(14) had earlier said that she will return to Mainland China to practise her profession for 3 years because she has been offered a job in Beijing and wanted to practise her profession in China. In keeping with her plan, she has since returned to Beijing, soon after her graduation from NUS. However, she will continue her studies in the USA to pursue her doctoral degree. Thereafter she will return to China to continue practising her profession. The decision not to remain in the USA, a country that most of her compatriots dream of, is indeed a surprise. Candidly, she echoes the view of her compatriot, above:

After my study I will go back to China because it is more comfortable. All my relations are in China. Suppose I get a successful career in US or in Singapore no one will share my happiness. It is very meaningful there [in China]. The other people can see your success actually.

The reasons given by GR2(14) and GR1(9+) for returning to China eventually are strikingly similar. Success means being able to share it with family and friends; respect is well-earned if ‘other people’ see it. If people can see one’s success and share one’s happiness, then one gains respect from them.

In summary, the above discussion has shown the various reasons given by participants who intend either to *re-main* in Singapore, *re-route* to other countries or *re-turn* to Mainland China. Whatever their plans are, almost all of them are sure of one thing: they will return to Mainland China eventually. In spite of all the participants have said about Singapore’s education being the best in the region and amongst the best in the world, the island nation does not seem to be attractive enough for them to remain permanently. It is not what they can offer to Singapore after they graduate, but rather what Singapore can offer them to stay. While some may move on to USA or UK the ultimate destination is home in Mainland China. The whole concept is thus about being pragmatic, albeit selectively.

5.6 Conclusion

In the preceding chapter, it was mentioned that the theory of ‘Selective Pragmatism’ would be presented in three main parts. The first two parts, the *participants* and the *story-line* were discussed in that chapter, which laid the groundwork for the third part. The third part was sub-divided into four sets of hypotheses. The *first set* discusses the General Theory of ‘Selective Pragmatism’. The *second set* discusses the processes of the theory. The *third set* discusses how the processes and categories of ‘Selective Pragmatism’ are understood within the context of: (1) Push Factors; (2) Pull Factors; (3) Individual Resilience and (4) Future Intentions. The first category examines the circumstances within Mainland China that

causes Mainland Chinese university students to seek education overseas. The second category was examined in two parts. The first part relates to their perceptions of education in other countries outside Mainland China, excluding Singapore. The second part relates to their perceptions of education in Singapore specifically. The necessity to divide the second category into two parts was because the participants' first attraction was not Singapore, but mainly USA or UK. However, Singapore became the next best alternative when certain circumstances prevented them from going to their preferred countries. The third category examines how the students coped with their new education and living environment. The fourth category examines the participants' future intentions. Each of the mentioned categories was the result of action and interaction of the participants' perceptions of education in Mainland China followed by their attractions to overseas education and their experiences in Singapore. The result of how they act and react to each circumstance categorised them into different types of participants. The hypothesis on the typology of participants represents the *fourth and final set* of the hypothesis relating to the theory of 'Selective Pragmatism. This is discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

A Typology of Mainland Chinese Students Studying in Singapore

6.0 Introduction

Previous chapters discussed the process of data collection and analysis from which a ‘substantive theory’ of ‘Selective Pragmatism’ emerged. The theory of Selective Pragmatism is linked to four hypotheses mentioned in Chapter Four which relate to the questions (1) Why do university students from Mainland China choose to study in Singapore? (as opposed to elsewhere) and (2) How do Mainland Chinese university students manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment?

The theory is an integral part of the grounded theory methodology adopted for this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The grounded typology emanated from the detailed discussion in Chapter Five on the four categories which were labelled as: (1) Push Factors; (2) Pull Factors; (3) Individual Resilience and (4) Future Intentions.

The Typology of Participants is the focus of this chapter. It explains the participants' different reactions towards the four distinct categories. The nature and importance of typologies will be discussed in the following section.

This chapter is structured into the following main Sections:

- 6.1 The Nature of Typologies
- 6.2 The Intellectuals
- 6.3 The Opportunists
- 6.4 The Loyalists

6.1 The Nature of Typologies

The typology was generated from, and refers to, the categorisation of participants based on their individual responses with regards to why they chose to study in Singapore and how they coped with their study while there. Typologies are an important dimension of the development and presentation of theory and provide the researcher with a powerful conceptual tool to enhance the theorising process.

In this study, the participants were classified into three types, the notion of type conforming to the sociological 'ideal type' as used by Max Weber (Aron, 1967, p. 201). The theory of 'ideal type' is merely a description and testing of a hypothesis about empirical reality. An example of how this has been applied by social scientists is provided by Merton (1968), who identified four 'ideal' types of 'rule-breakers'. In this case, the rule-breakers are merely a type constructed for discussion and not an exemplary example of conduct (Gerth & Mills, 1946). Gerth & Mills (1946) further explain: "As general concepts, ideal types are tools with which Weber prepares the descriptive materials of world history for comparative analysis" (p. 60).

The grounded typology in the present study is also referred to as the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The discussion on the two research (guiding) questions produced four categories in the preceding chapter. They are: (1) Push Factors; (2) Pull Factors; (3) Individual Resilience and (4) Future Intentions. It has also generated three types of participants. They are (1) The Intellectuals, (2) The

Opportunists and (3) The Loyalists. How these types relate to the respective categories is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 – Relation of typology of participants and categories

Ideal Types	Categories			
	Push Factors	Pull Factors	Individual Resilience	Future Intentions
Intellectuals	Affected by lack of quality education in Mainland China.	Attracted to quality of university and academics	Disciplined, hardworking and adaptable to adverse environment.	Will continue to pursue their educational interests either in Singapore or other countries.
Opportunists	Affected by the lack of opportunity in education and job prospects in Mainland China.	Attracted to quality of education, job prospects and better living conditions.	Able to take calculated short-term risks for long term benefits.	Will go to wherever the opportunities are better.
Loyalists	More circumspect in their criticisms of education in Mainland China.	View attractions in other countries as also beneficial to Mainland China.	Willing to sacrifice long-term good for self and country.	Will return to Mainland China, no matter what.

6.2 The Intellectuals

The meaning of ‘Intellectual’ relates to that group of participants whose characteristics are typical of scholars or academics. They are driven by scholastic achievement and reputation. Their primary focus is on the quality of education offered, and they are selectively pragmatic and realistic in the pursuit of their goals. The following discusses the relationships between the types of participants and the four categories that support the theory of Selective Pragmatism.

6.2.1 *The relationships of Intellectuals and the “Push Factors” category*

The discussion in the “Push Factors” category shows why Mainland Chinese university students feel compelled to seek education overseas. They are highly critical of the faults of the Mainland Chinese education system and are not afraid to make their views known, unlike most of their compatriots. However, true to their intellectual honesty, they give credit where it is due. While they may be critical of the poor infrastructure and impoverished environment of their universities, they were quick to point out that their basic foundation education up to senior high school was very strong. Other ‘Intellectuals’ – notably, GR1(1), GR1(9+), GR2(13) and GR2(14) - share the same view. For instance, GR2(16) observes that Beida is much better than NUS in [some faculties] because “it is bigger and has a longer history.”

His compatriot GR2(14), who came from a renowned university in China, also spoke frankly about the limitations of her faculty in that university and that she came to Singapore to develop her talents in a way she could not have back home. The Intellectuals were clear about the limitations of the Mainland universities and equally clear that they would have to leave China in order to develop their talents.

6.2.2 *The relationships of Intellectuals and the “Pull Factors” category*

The Intellectuals' quest for better education overseas is characterised by pragmatism and careful consideration. They know exactly what to look for in education – the quality of the university and its academics. The U.S.A. and the U.K. were their preferred destinations since they were believed to have the best universities in the world, but the high costs of studying in those countries, as well as the difficulties associated with getting a visa, put many Intellectuals off. The next best alternative was Singapore. Another important requirement for Intellectuals was that the institution must offer a high-quality education which prepares graduates for jobs in industry as well as government. The participants were especially keen to get 'real-life,' hands-on experience on their courses instead of more theoretical knowledge. Singapore, again, was attractive because it offered a good blend of both.

Singapore universities also offered world-class academic faculty. As GR1(6) states: "For me the reason is not because of the living environment, facilities or equipment, it is because you have better professors here." Although facilities and equipment are very important to participants, excellent professors were vital because these can give students knowledge beyond textbooks GR2(17). In a similar vein, GR2(15) states: "The most important quality [of the universities are] the academic achievements of [the] professors and the students." GR2(20) is of the view that a good university must have good facilities, professors, teaching excellence and graduates who are able to find employment easily. These factors sum up what Intellectuals regard as a 'quality education'.

6.2.3 The relationships of Intellectuals and the "Individual Resilience" category

As discussed in the previous chapter, the participants experienced learning difficulties when they began their studies in Singapore. The change from a teacher-led to a student-led approach proved extremely challenging for most, if not all.

The participants also found that there were several kinds of 'English' spoken in Singapore, ranging from standard English (spoken in a variety of accents) to 'Singlish,' or Singapore English. Because 'Singlish' is so idiosyncratic, it is not easily understood

by those who are unfamiliar with it. Mainland Chinese students found it extremely difficult to understand and some grew to dislike it intensely.

As far as the change in learning approaches was concerned, the Mainland Chinese students found that long hours of study were hardly enough to compensate for having to do their research on their own, instead of having it all given to them so that they could pass exams. In Singapore universities, students were expected to take responsibility for their own learning and do their own research. To many Mainland Chinese students, this transition was the biggest shock (GR1, 9+ and GR2, 20). Even the two participants who were most proficient in the English language found it difficult to cope with the change.

Through sheer resilience, the participants would take whatever they could from lectures, go back to their hostels or libraries and continue studying on their own for many hours afterwards. As GR1(5) says: “I will try to overcome the problem by concentrating on the lecture for that hour and then I will read my notes or textbook ...”

The participants also found they had to read a lot more than their textbooks in order to succeed. Library resources were ample; the issue was how they were supposed to review, identify and then read the relevant and numerous books, articles and so on which were all part of the course. Here again, the Intellectuals’ dogged determination helped them overcome the obstacles.

6.2.4 The relationships of Intellectuals and the “Future Intentions” category

Since Intellectuals focused on scholastic achievement, it is unlikely that they would stop their formal education after graduating from Singapore universities. In fact, all of them, from the undergraduates to the PhDs, planned to continue their education and research overseas.

As GR1(9+), an undergraduate student from NTU, says he would continue to pursue his Masters in Accountancy in the USA after he graduates from Singapore, in spite of the high cost of an education in the US. As GR2(14) says: “I think I will go back to Beijing to work for 3 years and then maybe I will pursue a doctoral degree in the United States.” GR2(15), a doctorate student at NUS, says she will remain in

Singapore if she can find good co-workers in research and advance her knowledge and research interests that way.

6.3 The Opportunists

The meaning of “Opportunists” relates to the participants’ characteristics that resemble those of an explorer. Their focus is not always on academic quality or excellence. They are pragmatic in the sense that they seek, and benefit from, opportunities. The word ‘Opportunity’ is grounded in the data and is therefore captured as an *in-vivo* code in this section. The following discusses the relationships between this ideal type, the Opportunists, and the four categories that support the theory of Selective Pragmatism.

6.3.1 *The relationships of Opportunists and the “Push Factors” category.*

In earlier sections, the “Push Factors” category was explained in terms of the circumstances which cause Mainland Chinese university students to seek education overseas. The Opportunists relate to this category in terms of the lack of learning and career opportunities in their universities. As GR2(13) explains, “there are more opportunities here (Singapore) than in China.”

Another “Push Factors” was the fact that good jobs were increasingly difficult to find in an increasingly crowded labour market. During the Máo era, retrenchments were unheard of -- graduates were put to work in the countryside or in factories. But a change in economic policy resulted in more people graduating from universities while the numbers of unprofitable State-Owned Enterprises (SOE) have also increased. As retrenched workers from the SOE swelled the unemployment figures, so too did the large numbers of unemployed graduates. Ong Hwee Hwee reports:

...a record 2.12 million university graduates will join the country’s labour force, representing a near 50-per-cent surge from last year’s 1.45 million graduates. They are the

lucky ones who benefited from the university enrolment expansion policy, introduced in 1999 to popularise tertiary education. Ironically, they are also the first batch to face the threat of unemployment – a phenomenon previously unheard of among China's crème de la crème (The Straits Times, p. A3, January 16, 2003).

Another recent report stated that the unemployment scene is expected to get worse: the number of university graduates is expected to hit a record 3.4 million students next year... (The Straits Times, p. A3, June 17, 2004)

The Opportunists in this section saw this trend as a strong reason to leave the country, at least temporarily. On a more optimistic note, GR2(15) argues that graduates with first class universities have better opportunities and only “some undergraduates will have difficulties in finding a job.” GR2(17+) agrees that even undergraduates from normal universities will be able to find jobs, if they want to. This argument is of little comfort to Opportunists who faced uncertain job prospects in the country -- they regard the “lack of opportunities” in the country as a compelling reason to seek education and other opportunities overseas.

6.3.2 The relationships of Opportunists and the “Pull Factors” category.

In the “Pull Factors” category the issue of why Mainland Chinese university students were attracted to the USA, UK and Singapore was discussed. The Opportunists were quick to add that other opportunities in the USA, such as jobs and better living standards (GR2, 17+), contribute significantly to their decision to venture overseas. As GR1(12) explains, Mainland Chinese university students look to “the USA for better education, jobs or opportunities” because the USA is a “very developed country” (GR1, 3) and people “can have a better life” (GR1, 7). The USA is also a “much bigger country” with “higher standards of living” and “opportunities are better” (GR2, 15). Another Opportunist GR1(8) says it as a matter of fact that “when you are in the best country; of course there are more opportunities there.”

His compatriot, GR1(9+) agrees that Mainland Chinese believe wholeheartedly in the American dream: “America is a place that you can pick up gold on the streets” and “most Chinese have this American dream in their heart.” However, the opportunities in the USA and UK remain only a dream for many because of high costs and visa application problems. Nonetheless, they were quick to seize the next best opportunities presented to them on a ‘platter’ -- scholarships and tuition grants offered by the authorities in Singapore. These opportunities were as good as they could have hoped for. The substantial savings in fees, the generous allowances and the opportunity to work in Singapore for 3 to 6 years or more created an opportunity too good to be missed. It is not surprising that many like GR1(5) were glad to take up the scholarships or tuition grants. In addition, it provided them with the opportunity to be independent because they no longer had to depend on their parents for living expenses (GR1(5) and GR2(17)). GR1(10) seized the opportunity to come to Singapore because she felt that her university was not good enough for her. As she says: “here comes the opportunity, so I come” [This is in reference to the offer of tuition grants by authorities in Singapore]. Another Opportunist GR2(13) says she chose to accept the full scholarships to study in Singapore because of the opportunity to mingle with world-class professors. She said this was important because it would help her perform better when she went back home to work at the university there. Sharing the same sentiments, GR2(14), a self-sponsored student, says: “Here [in Singapore] I can get the best professors and I can have a lot of opportunities and the expense is also one of the considerations.” True to the Opportunists’ traits, GR1(2) summed up their feelings about why they came to Singapore by saying, “in addition to the low course fee and low cost of living, we came here to find opportunities.”

6.3.3 *The relationships of Opportunists and the “Individual Resilience” category.*

The value of Individual Resilience in this section relates to the flexibility of Opportunists to circumvent the difficulties by taking calculated risks in getting to the opportunities. Some of these Opportunists were holding good jobs in Mainland China prior to their arrival in Singapore. An Opportunist, GR2(17+), was holding a senior

executive position in Mainland China, but gave it up to take up a postgraduate course in NUS. Similarly, GR2(13) and GR2(15) also gave up good jobs in China to take up the full scholarships offered by Singapore. GR2's (17+) decision to quit an executive position in Mainland China is a risk not many would contemplate in view of the high unemployment rate in the country. However, he saw education in Singapore as an opportunity for him to live in the country, although he claimed that his original intention was to be with his wife who had been working in Singapore for some time. He has since found a permanent job with a multinational corporation in Singapore. This was not a gamble, but a strategy of resilience that they adopt for long-term benefits. As GR1(4) says, overseas-trained graduates have better job opportunities when they return to Mainland China.

6.3.4 The relationships of Opportunists and the "Future Intentions" category.

The Opportunists' future intentions are motivated by where they can obtain the maximum opportunities. They were attracted by the many opportunities which the USA, UK and Singapore offer. As GR1(3) says, the USA is a "developed country and the opportunity to find jobs is better and the environment is very good." All her compatriots have no argument with this perception. Although some intellectuals, such as GR2(13), had earlier mentioned that they chose to study in Singapore because of the better opportunities in the island state, they will not remain in Singapore after graduation because they feel that Mainland China offers more opportunities than Singapore. An undergraduate Opportunist shares the same sentiments: "China is a most promising country." Those who were bonded to work in Singapore will remain in Singapore to work between 2 years to 6 years after their graduation, if they are able to find a job. GR1(2) like all students in the tuition grants and full-scholarships categories saw this as an opportunity to gain some work experience before moving on. As GR1(6) had earlier stated: "I will work in Singapore for a few years to accumulate some experience and then return home." Another Opportunist, GR1(4), would like to move on to another country for more experience, but may return to live in Singapore if she is able to find a job that suits her. However, there is no certainty that their plans will be carried out according to their wishes. GR2(19), for instance, had said that he would

remain in Singapore to work for a few years after his graduation but ended up leaving Singapore soon after completing his course in NUS.

6.4 The Loyalists

The meaning of ‘Loyalists’ relates closely to the notion of patriot. They are more muted in their criticisms of their country’s education system. They are less enthusiastic about the scholarships from the universities in Singapore because of their belief that some universities in Mainland China were just as good, if not better. The following account discusses the relationships between the ideal type known as the Loyalist and the four categories that support the theory of Selective Pragmatism.

6.4.1 *The relationships of Loyalists and the “Push Factors” category.*

The Loyalists displayed a different value towards the “Push Factors” category. They were quite reluctant to discuss the differences between the education environment of Singapore and Mainland China. Contrary to the views expressed by his compatriots, GR2(17) was still of the opinion that there is no difference between universities in Singapore and those in Mainland China: “To be honest, I think they are almost the same.” As to what he meant by *the same* he said that the style of teaching and the course contents are much the same. The only difference, he said, was the medium of instruction. Nevertheless, he accepted the scholarship from NUS only after his application to study in the USA had been rejected. He has since left Singapore without completing his course. His other Loyalist compatriots are also of the opinion that not all institutions or all students in Mainland China are inferior to those of Singapore. As GR2(16) states in defence of Beida, which he claimed is better than Singaporean universities in some areas, it has a very long history, so some faculties are definitely better than NUS. He revealed that Beida has a well-stocked library with “many books on different fields.” Interestingly, he claims that the Cultural Revolution did not affect all the research in the universities, although thousands of intellectuals such as professors, scientists, writers, and artist were exiled to the countryside for rehabilitation (Vohra, 2000, p. 261). Many of these were harassed, beaten, or tortured at the hands of

their own students – often to death (Harding, 1991). The fortunate ones were returned to their positions of honour only in 1979 (Vohra, 2000).

Although many participants claimed that graduates from universities in Singapore will fare better than graduates in Mainland China, including those from the *elite* universities, loyalists like GR2(17+) argued that this is not always the case. He argued that Mainland China has such a large population it is not possible to be better than everyone. Graduates from Beida and Tsinghua are the *elite* scholars from a population of more than one billion people.

While the participants generally agreed that the quality of schools in Mainland China may not be as good as Singapore's, the Loyalists were also quick to point out that some of their high schools or universities are the best in the country or at least in their province. As GR1(8) says, although the best schools in China may not be as good as Singapore, "in terms of environment, facilities and equipment", the "best colleges in China have more experienced teachers." In this respect, schools in China may be as good as those in Singapore. GR2(20) claims that his university in central China is amongst the best in China.

While the Loyalists may defend the honour and prestige of their own schools or universities, however, they were pragmatic enough to realise the many shortcomings within their own education environment. Their presence in Singapore to seek quality education testifies to this realisation on their part. The only difference between them and the Opportunists or Intellectuals is that they were more circumspect in their criticisms of the institutions they came from.

6.4.2 *The relationships of Loyalists and the "Pull Factors" category.*

The perceptions of the Loyalists with regards to the quality of education offered by USA, UK and Singapore universities did not differ substantially from those of the Opportunists or the Intellectuals. Pragmatic reasons prevailed. In the same context, their positive perception towards the USA, UK and Singapore is all about benefits. As GR2(17+) says: "Although we may have problems, we can still go there and learn from them. This will also benefit China." The pragmatic argument shows that the Loyalists

are rational in their decision-making. As GR1(5) explained earlier, Mainland Chinese students still go to the USA in spite of the serious political problems, because “It is not the right time for China to do something against this country (USA) [because] we need to develop our economy now.” As GR1(9+) earlier explains, the problems between the two countries “is not about food.” In the same spirit, GR1(6) says that Mainland Chinese still buy Japanese goods, in spite of the fact that they have more serious political problems with Japan. The reason is simple: Japanese goods are better and less expensive. The Loyalists, on the other hand, were able to exercise Selective Pragmatism by not allowing negative political environmental factors to deny them a quality education and other opportunities. They are selectively pragmatic because they deal only with those countries which hold the greatest opportunities for them without requiring that they compromise their loyalty towards Mainland China.

6.4.3 The relationships of Loyalists and the “Individual Resilience” category.

The Loyalists share the same value of Individual Resilience with other types of participants. This relates to their willingness to sacrifice their initial opportunities for long term gains. As GR2(13) states, the opportunity cost for her to come to Singapore was very high. This was because she had to give up her job, and the *Guanxi* that she had developed in her work-place and her own family. In spite of these she was able to quickly adapt to the new environment in Singapore. Since then, she has had no regrets, as she says: “I have learnt a lot in study such as top skills to do research and the opportunity to interact with top professors.” Her compatriot who was then doing her Master’s degree in one of the top universities in Mainland China was quite undecided whether to give up her course and at the same time lose her opportunity to become a university lecturer in her country. In addition, she too was plagued by emotional problems because of the need to leave her loved ones behind. She accepted the scholarship only because she realised that the quality of learning in Singapore was better and that she would have the opportunities to interact with “many good professors.” She believed this would enhance her opportunity to lecture in Mainland universities in future.

The Loyalists’ decision to take up the challenge in Singapore shows their great confidence in making good their initial sacrifice and in overcoming the difficulties in

Singapore, that is, individual resilience. Both have since recovered from their emotional stress and are coping well in their studies and are definitely happier compared to when they first arrived in Singapore.

6.4.4 *The relationships of Loyalists and the “Future Intentions” category.*

Earlier, it was stated that the *Intellectuals* intended to pursue their academic interests at some point after completing their studies in Singapore. The *Opportunists*, by contrast, will take the opportunity to gain some work experience before returning to Mainland China, although some may even return to Singapore. The *Loyalists*’ future intentions are largely to return to Mainland China eventually, whatever their plans may be.

The loyalty of GR2(13) was not diminished by the many benefits that she enjoys under the full-scholarship scheme. As she says: “I think China needs me more.” Similarly, her compatriot GR2(15) who had earlier said that she may remain in Singapore, if she can find a good research partner, will also return to Mainland China upon her graduation. As she says: “My career is in China... I don’t think I want to stay here because five years is enough”, five years being the duration of her studies in Singapore.

There were some who may move on to another country to gain more work experience before returning to Mainland China. As GR1(10) says “I may go somewhere, but I will eventually go back to China.” Her compatriot GR1(6) will also return to Mainland China after accumulating some work experience in Singapore. As to why they will only work for a few years, GR1(2) had earlier said: “Because I think China is the most promising country. It is difficult because I’m a Chinese. I want to contribute to my country.”

GR2(16), a tall and scholarly looking gentleman, said earlier that NUS students tend not to return to China, but he himself is returning to China after working in Singapore for a few years. As GR2(18) says: “If I can find a job here maybe I will make this my home but when I get old, I will want to go back because [it is] my home-country.” This sums up the characteristics of Loyalists towards their own country.

According to GR1(1), this is in line with the Chinese idiom: *Luo Ye Gui Gen* (落叶归根) – “the leaves of the trees will return to their roots.”

6.5 Conclusion

The study of Mainland Chinese university students’ perceptions of studying in Singapore resulted in the identification and discussion of a threefold typology of Mainland Chinese students. The full discussion of how each type relates to each of the four categories further enhances the grounded theory of Selective Pragmatism. This in turn demonstrates how all the hypotheses forming the whole structure of the theory, mentioned in Chapter Four, are inter-linked. The generation of a typology in turn facilitates a grounded theory of why and how Mainland Chinese students manage the experience of studying in Singapore.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

7.0 Introduction

The phenomenon of Mainland Chinese university students studying in Singapore is fairly new. It is a phenomenon shared by other education-exporting countries, especially the USA and the UK.

This phenomenon is partly a reaction to Mainland China's self-imposed isolation from 1949 to 1976 and the series of tragic events which followed in its wake. The country's educational system suffered terrible damage under Chairman Máo's leadership, culminating in another round of self-isolation when the student unrest in Tiananmen Square erupted into violence in 1989. It was only with Deng's re-appearance in 1992 that Mainland China once again established ties with the international community. Some writers believe that this marked the first time Mainland China truly opened its doors to the world. It was also about this time that Singapore saw a trickle of Mainland Chinese students into Singapore, a trickle which has since

turned into a flood. Similarly, the world's major exporters of education, namely, the USA and the UK, have also seen a dramatic increase in the number of fee-paying Mainland Chinese students in their institutions of higher learning.

During Mainland China's self-imposed isolation from 1949 to 1976, the world knew very little about what went on inside the country. Thus, much of the literature on Chinese students in the USA and UK was either based on ethnic Chinese outside Mainland China or after Máo's era ended in 1976. The most recent studies on Mainland Chinese university students studying in Singapore (see Lee, Ho, Meyer, Varaprasad, Young & Fong (2003); Zhang (2000); and Zhang (2001)) have acknowledged that further studies need to be done concerning Mainland Chinese students studying in Singapore. Other literature on this topic is dated (Livingstone, 1960; Rao, 1976; Kinnel 1990) and much of it, according to researchers like Taylor (1987, p. 299) shows the "relative lack and poor quality of research information."

The important question of how their *culture* affects Mainland Chinese students and other ethnic Chinese studying beyond the countries in which they were born and grew up is also under-explored. According to Walker & Dimmock (1999), the concept of "societal culture has not been rigorously applied to the field of educational leadership and administration, or as a means for comparing the organisation of individual schools" (pp. 321-348). (See Appendix 'I' for a discussion on the problematic nature of defining culture). Similarly, Cheng (1995) argues that: "the cultural element is not only necessary, but essential in the study of educational administration" (p. 99).

As Máo discovered, the plan to transplant the Soviet Union education system into Mainland China failed miserably. A study which focuses on Mainland Chinese university students studying in Singapore and the cultural factors which influence this process is thus a valuable undertaking.

This last chapter of the thesis is presented in five sections. They are: (1) Summary of the main findings; (2) Transferability (generalisability) of the research findings; (3) General implications of the research findings; (4) The implications of the findings for the development of policies; and (5) The implications of the findings for practice. Throughout the chapter, areas for future research are proposed.

7.1 Summary of the study

The aim of the research reported in this study is to develop a theory on the perceptions of Mainland Chinese university students studying in Singapore. The study was guided by two main research questions: (1) Why do university students from Mainland China choose to study in Singapore? (As opposed to elsewhere). And (2) How do Mainland Chinese university students manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment? The significance of the study is enhanced by the fact that Singapore aims to triple the number of international students from 50,000 to 150,000 in 2012 (Ministry of Trade & Industry, 2003).

Students from Mainland China are likely to form the majority of international students in Singapore for economic and political reasons. In economic terms, it is clear that Singapore offers the best of both worlds – low cost and high quality. In political terms, Deng Xiaoping's exhortation in 1992 to "learn from Singapore" opened a floodgate for thousands of Mainland Chinese officials to visit Singapore.

This study focuses on a small group of Mainland Chinese university students studying in the two main universities in Singapore. The reason to opt for an in-depth study of the participants was to secure rich data, and more importantly, to communicate the necessary information in a coherent manner. Within this context, the study seeks to develop a theory on why Mainland Chinese university students choose to study in Singapore (as opposed to elsewhere) and how they manage the experience of studying in Singapore, a different cultural environment.

The outcome of this study is relevant and timely to the authorities in Singapore who actively seek to 'export' Singapore's brand of education. The same applies to the USA, UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and other countries which are keen to export their education to Mainland Chinese students. It could also be of interest to the authorities in Mainland China to know their own citizens' perceptions of education in their own country and why some of their most talented and ambitious students are keen to pursue education abroad. This study is therefore of local, regional and international interest.

In order to understand the phenomenon in-depth, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate. This approach allowed the researcher to interact closely with the participants by way of semi-structured interviews and the recording of weekly diaries by the participants. Data collection lasted for a period of about 16 months, beginning from 16 October 2004. The process of action and interaction is in keeping with Symbolic Interactionism, first suggested by Mead (1934), and commonly associated with qualitative research (Gall et al., 1999). The three premises of Symbolic Interactionism discussed in Chapter Three are crucial in exploring the phenomenon of this study in-depth and, ultimately, the generation of the grounded theory of 'Selective Pragmatism'. The procedures in grounded theory allow the researcher to collect, collate and analyse the data systematically to develop the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23 and Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 188). By relying solely on the data generated by participants, this researcher has aimed to avoid personal bias as much as possible. However, he admits that his initial experience and knowledge of Mainland China and its students has both enriched, and been enriched through, his interaction with the participants. In turn, the interaction with interviewees throughout the data collection exercise has helped greatly in developing and reinforcing the theory.

The sample (20 participants plus 2 replacements) was drawn from Singapore's two main universities, the NUS and the NTU and its affiliates the NIE. The participants from NTU and NIE were doing their basic degree whereas those in NUS were either doing their master's degree or doctoral degree. The sample consists of 12 female and 10 male participants from different age groups, ranging from the late teens to mid-thirties. In total, the participants came from 14 different parts of Mainland China. In addition, the different level of the participants' maturity and the balanced number of males and females in the study provides rich variety to the study, making possible the development of 'dense theory'.

To ensure that the whole exercise proceeded smoothly, three pilot interviews were conducted to ensure that the interview questions were appropriate and would generate rich data for analysis. After each pilot with different trial interviewees, the questions were refined further. Although it was discovered that a group interview was not feasible, the helpful cooperation of all the participants through interviews and the

keeping of diaries enabled the researcher to carry out the necessary analysis with few problems.

Semi-structured interviews made the task of achieving theoretical sampling easier. This type of data collection is a form of non-probability sampling, in which the objective of developing theory guides the process of sampling and data collection. This allows the researcher to analyse the initial data and then decide how to proceed from there (Janesick, 1994). The interview schedule enabled the researcher to decide the questions and comments to use in order to lead the interviewee toward the interviewer's objectives (Gall et al., 1999, p. 132).

7.2 The Theory of Selective Pragmatism

The theory of selective pragmatism that emerges from this study is as follows. It is made up of a typology consisting of three types of participants, as follows: (1) “Intellectuals”; (2) “Loyalists” and (3) “Opportunists”. The emergence of the typology and the distinct categories generated from the grounded data lead to the theory of ‘Selective Pragmatism’. All three types are pragmatic, but in different ways and for different reasons. The Intellectuals are primarily driven by the pragmatic pursuit of the highest academic and scholastic standards. Their reasons for leaving China (push factors) and seeking higher education overseas (pull factors) are motivated by the desire to challenge themselves intellectually against world-class academic standards. Academic knowledge is sought for purposes of research and is seen as intrinsically valuable. Their resilience comes from their academic self-belief and their intention to pursue further studies after graduation. The Loyalists, on the other hand, are primarily driven by the pragmatic pursuit of a higher education that will maximize their contributions to the people and economy of Mainland China upon their return. They are less quick to criticise the Mainland higher education system and are stout defenders of their country. The Opportunists are likewise pragmatically driven, but in a different way. While not ruling out their eventual return to the Mainland, they are pragmatic

primarily in seeking out and exploiting the best opportunities for themselves, wherever they may be, especially if these take the form of financial assistance, such as grants and scholarships. The theory of ‘Selective Pragmatism’ is supported by five categories in all. They are: (1) Push Factors; (2a) Pull Factors (Other countries outside Mainland China, but excluding Singapore); (2b) Pull Factors (Singapore only); (3) Individual Resilience and (4) Future Intentions. Each category is in turn supported by its respective concepts.

As the participants came from many different parts of Mainland China and differ in age and socio-economic background, it is not surprising that their degree of ‘Selective Pragmatism’ also varies. The word ‘Pragmatic’ was captured as an *in-vivo* code during the interviews. The importance of *in-vivo* codes rests with their ‘analytic usefulness’ and ‘imagery’ (Strauss, 1987, pp. 33-34). The grounded theory of ‘Selective Pragmatism’ emerged as an important category when all participants began to display pragmatism selectively in each of the categories together with their respective concepts. In the “Push Factors” category, the participants displayed different degrees of dissatisfaction over what caused them to seek education overseas while also readily acknowledging the strengths their high schools and *elite* universities possessed. These, they believe, had to do with the rich history and heritage of their universities which they feel put some of their faculties on a par with, if not above, the best universities in the world.

While they may be proud to be associated with some of the *elite* or top universities in Mainland China, they were again pragmatic enough to realise that they needed to go overseas in order to get a leading-edge education in resource-rich universities. They were able to recognise that, as one participant put it: “China is so undeveloped, so if we don’t leave the country, what good is there for us.” It is for the same reason that many of them will also not remain in Singapore if better opportunities present themselves either in China or elsewhere. Their ‘pragmatic’ rationale is evident in all the categories and concepts that emerged from the study. This in turn provides strong support for the grounded theory of ‘Selective Pragmatism’ in this study.

The theory of ‘Selective Pragmatism’ is presented in three main parts, consisting of the story line followed by the various hypotheses, which are summed up with a proposition on the typology of participants. The aim of the different hypotheses

was to provide a unique body of knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 38) to describe the emergent theory in this study. The procedures involve three essential aspects of inquiry - namely, induction, deduction and verification (Strauss, 1987, p. 12).

Another essential part of this study is the summary of the literature on similar topics related to the mobility of international students. Chalmers (1998), citing Chenitz & Swanson (1986) and Taylor & Bogdan (1984), states that this method of literature summary presentation is 'consistent with the symbolic interaction research approach and the grounded theory methods of data gathering and analysis utilised in the study'. The study of previous research allows a more comprehensive understanding within which the 'present' study can be contextualised (Simon, 1966).

7.3 Research findings and their transferability (generalisability)

This study is not generalisable in the way a quantitative researcher might expect. In any case, the sheer numbers of Mainland Chinese students going overseas to study would make it impossible to generalise findings across all of them. It was therefore more realistic to do an in-depth study within a sample of a small group of 22 information-rich individuals. The research approach and the method of investigation used make it more appropriate to use the term *transferability* instead of generalisability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Punch (1998, p. 261) also states that transferability is a word that is preferred to generalisability in a qualitative research study. Although the findings of the study pertain directly to the group of students studied, the findings, especially those which relate to Chinese social behaviour and culture, may have some applications for ethnic Chinese outside Mainland China. As Strauss & Corbin (1994, p. 278) state:

Insofar as theory that is developed through this methodology is able to specify consequences and their related conditions, the theorist can claim predictability for it, in the limited sense that if elsewhere approximately similar conditions obtain, then approximately similar consequences should occur.

Thus, the combination of the various hypotheses presented in this study has created a *thick description* (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 28) that hopefully enables interested readers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic, or to transfer insights gained therein to their own study of related phenomena. Lincoln & Guba (1985) sum up the impossibility of providing ‘external validity’ in a manner required by conventional researchers with the advice that:

...the naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility (p. 316).

Since the findings of this thesis are ‘transferable’ rather than generalisable, they enable the reader to identify and form their own conclusions and to serve as a focal point of reference for researchers or readers who have an interest in this topic. This group may include, for instance, the relevant authorities and professionals from both Mainland China and education-exporting countries such as the USA, UK, Singapore and other countries.

7.4 Proposition for further development of theory

There are three immediate possibilities for future research. *Firstly*, future studies could focus on the key problems that Mainland Chinese university students face in relation to the way the English language is used in Singapore. Future studies might focus on whether Singapore should try to curb the use of ‘Singlish’ and/or reform the way the English language is spoken in Singapore, especially within formal educational institutions. *Secondly*, future studies could focus on how Mainland Chinese university students studying in Singapore might be helped to better manage the transition from teacher-centred learning to student-centred learning environments. *Thirdly*, future research could focus on how institutions and academics can be better informed on how

Mainland Chinese students are influenced by culture in the way they learn and socialise. Aspects of Chinese culture have been shown to be a stumbling block for Mainland Chinese students in their attempts to integrate well into local communities, whether in Singapore, Britain or elsewhere. It would therefore be prudent to heed the call of Dimmock (2000); Walker & Dimmock (1999) and Cheng (1995) to further investigate the influence of societal culture on education (See Appendix 'I' for a discussion on the problematic nature of defining culture).

7.5 Proposition for the development of policy

There are four possible policy implications of this study. These propositions are borne out of the grounded theory of 'Selective Pragmatism'. The four policy implications relate to: (1) the stringent screening of candidates' competency in the English language before scholarships or tuition grants are offered; (2) the reform of the English language environment within the institutions, and possibly the wider Singapore society; (3) establishing student assistance programs to help Mainland Chinese university students adapt to the new teaching and learning environment; (4) establishing programs to help the Mainland Chinese university students' adapt to the new social and cultural environment in Singapore; and (5) actively encouraging Mainland Chinese students who graduate from universities in Singapore to remain and contribute to the island nation's economy. Again, these policy implications are likely to apply not just to Singapore, but to other countries seeking to attract Mainland Chinese students.

7.5.1 *Proposition for the development of policy involving Mainland Chinese university students' difficulties with the English language.*

This matter was quite similar to the problems faced by the institutions when Mainland Chinese scholars began arriving in the USA in the late 1970s. However, the problem has since been eliminated in the 1980s with a simple change to the admission policy. By offering scholarships only to those who pass stringent English language

tests, the USA ensured that only Mainland Chinese students with a good command of the English language entered US schools (Orleans, 1988, pp. 24-25). The institutions in Singapore may consider a similar policy in the admission of sponsored Mainland Chinese students. The rationale behind this argument is that if the students are to receive full or partial sponsorship from Singapore, then the nation reserves the right to accept only the best, including those who are fluent in English. Although the participants in this study revealed that their selection was based on the test they had taken in Mainland China, it has become obvious, at least to this researcher, that this measure may not be sufficient and needs, perhaps, to be revised.

7.5.2 Proposition for the development of policy involving the reform of the English language environment within the institutions, and possibly on a national scale.

The language problems plaguing the Mainland Chinese students may not be entirely their fault, however. Although some of the literature suggests that the problems lie solely with the students themselves (Orleans, 1988; Taylor, 1987; Kinnel et al., 1990), this study has found that the way the English language is spoken in Singapore exacerbates their problems. ‘Singlish,’ or Singapore’s own brand of English, has received attention in the national media and is even studied at NUS as an interesting linguistic phenomenon in its own right. While its proponents favour it for nationalistic reasons, the fact is that foreigners find it very difficult to understand. The fact that it is the *de facto* language of the vast majority of Singaporeans who are not able to switch easily between ‘Singlish’ and ‘standard English’ makes ‘Singlish’ a problem with economic and political implications. As the Mainland Chinese students point out, with disappointment, Singapore is not an ‘absolute’ or ‘true’ English language speaking country. In addition, the participants in this study faced problems with the ‘Indian’ accent. The word ‘Indian’ is in inverted commas because it is not always clear to which nationality the participants are referring. Nevertheless, the problem is serious enough for some participants to avoid attending lectures or to avoid taking any courses where there were ‘Indian’ lecturers. While the researcher acknowledges that the lecturers at

the universities in Singapore are of exceptionally high quality, one can also argue that the best lecturers in the world are of little or no use to the students if they cannot be understood.

The answer therefore lies with the reform of the English language environment within the institutions, and if possible on a nation-wide scale. This study has shown that the participants are very critical of the way the English language is spoken in Singapore. According to some participants, this has prevented some of their best compatriots from joining them in Singapore. Although it is not yet known how critical this problem is, the findings in this study should not be taken lightly because many of the participants were either selected from the top universities in Mainland China or could have been admitted into one had they not accepted the scholarships or tuition grants to study in Singapore. It is therefore detrimental to Singapore if this issue is not adequately addressed.

7.5.3 Proposition for the development of policy to help Mainland Chinese university students to adapt to the new teaching and learning environment.

There are two possible implications of the research findings in this section. The first is how Mainland Chinese university students can be helped to adapt to Singapore's way of teaching and learning. The second is how Singapore academics can be better informed about how Chinese culture might inhibit Mainland Chinese students' ways of learning.

As discussed in chapters five and six, this study found that the participants were adversely affected by the transition from a teacher-centred learning environment in Mainland China to a student-centred learning environment in Singapore. Although the NTU participants were full of praise for the training that they received from the NIE prior to taking their degree courses, there were still some who found it difficult to adjust. Perhaps the length of the course in NIE could be varied for different students. The academic departments of the respective institutions could also arrange for some orientation programs to prepare the students specifically to cope with the new education environment.

With regards to the Mainland Chinese students' styles of learning, this study found that the participants were more inclined to be individualistic rather than collectivist, as is commonly assumed by other researchers (for example, see Hofstede,

1980). Meyer (2003), for instance, in her study of Mainland Chinese university students in the NUS found no conclusive evidence that her participants preferred ‘collective’ arrangements with each other. This led to her warning against implementing group work without prior student agreement. Meyer’s work seems to confirm other studies which show that the highly competitive Chinese education system encourages individualistic, rather than cooperative, behaviour. The findings in this study show that the social behaviour and the learning habits of the participants are closely linked to their culture (Dimmock, 2000; Dimmock & Walker, 1999; and Cheng, 1995). Policy-makers should consider ways, therefore, to help academics better understand the Chinese way of learning so that they can help their Mainland Chinese students adjust to the new teaching and learning environment.

7.5.4 Proposition for the development of policy involving Mainland Chinese university students’ adaptation to the new social and cultural environment in Singapore.

As explained earlier, cultural forces influence the students’ learning habits. These cultural influences extend to their social habits as well. Trust, for instance, is a major factor in social relationships. Gao’s research (1991), for example, emphasises the importance of trust in relationships among Chinese. Furthermore, Leong (2006) reports Singapore’s former Minister of State for Trade & Industry and Education, Chan Soo Sen as observing that trust is a very important element which must be in place before the Chinese will open up to another person. This study concurs with Meyer’s findings (2003) and it was for similar reasons that the planned group interviews were not carried out in this research.

This finding has strong implications for the relevant department in the institutions in Singapore and other education-exporting countries. For example, teachers should not rush to implement group activities that may seem to align with collectivism, but which may, instead, add unnecessary stress on students. Nevertheless, it is important to continue to find ways to help Mainland Chinese students adapt successfully to their new social environment, for many reasons. If they are able to make

friends and build strong networks of trust and loyalty during their time in Singapore, the chances increase that they will stay on to contribute to Singapore's economy.

7.5.5 Proposition for the development of policy to attract top Mainland Chinese university students to remain in Singapore after their graduation.

Although the undergraduate students in NTU and its affiliate NIE were bonded to remain to work in Singapore between 3 to 6 years after they graduate, most of the participants expressed a strong desire to move on soon after graduation. The reasons given ranged from the lack of opportunities in Singapore to the feeling of not being accepted as part of Singapore's culture and people. Even those who are likely to stay on in Singapore express the desire to return to Mainland China eventually.

Since it would be unreasonable to expect even the bond or scholarship holders to stay on in Singapore out of gratitude simply because they were sponsored by the government, policy-makers have to come up with new ways of enticing them to stay in Singapore after they graduate. In a globalised world and armed with world-class degrees from Singapore, the world is their oyster and they will move to where the best opportunities lie. After all, the participants are fully aware that the 'bond' is only an obligation and cannot be enforced if they choose to leave. This sentiment will need to be addressed to maximize the returns from the large amounts of time and public funds which have been spent to train and groom them.

7.5.6 Summary of the proposition for the development of policy

The USA and UK can and will remain as the top choices for Mainland Chinese university students by virtue of their world-renowned standards of education. Singapore, on the other hand, cannot afford to become complacent. As the literature has shown, students are aware of their rights and if 'fee-paying,' they demand to be given the service and the standard of education that they deserve. Singapore's competitive edge, therefore, will have to be in the area of services. Mainland Chinese students will need to feel well-served if they are to continue to feel attracted to attend Singapore

universities. The need to meet the demands of the students becomes more acute because of the island nation's plan to capture a bigger slice of the world's education market valued at US\$2.2 trillion or S\$3.7 trillion (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2003). This is an appropriate time to be reminded of the address of Henry III to the inhabitants of Cambridge that: "Unless you conduct yourselves with more restraint and moderation towards them [overseas students], they will be driven into abandoning their studies and leaving the country, which we by no means desire" (Elsey & Kinnell, 1990). This advice serves as a good reminder to education-exporting countries that they must not underestimate the power of 'fee-paying' international students. If the maxim of 'the customer is always right' is true, then the statement of Henry III remains as valid today as the day it was uttered.

7.6 Conclusion

The grounded theory of 'Selective Pragmatism' that emerges from this study offers an explanatory insight into the perceptions of Mainland Chinese university students studying in Singapore. The *thick description* of the theory suggests implications for the further development of other theories and policies. It is proposed that the combination of both theory and its implications addresses the question of why Mainland Chinese university students choose to study in Singapore (rather than elsewhere) and how they cope with their new education environment. Although the focus of this study is on Mainland Chinese students studying in Singapore universities, the findings might well apply to Mainland Chinese students at other levels, such as school and tertiary, studying in their adopted countries. Similarly, the study may have relevance for other education-exporting countries and institutions which accept students from Mainland China. The theory of 'Selective Pragmatism' is offered as an explanatory theory as to why Chinese students seek an education overseas and how they manage the problems when there.

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Appendix 'A'

Interview questions for first pilot interview

1. Verification of participant's profile.
2. Explanation on the purpose of interview.
3. Explaining the absolute rights of the participants whether to answer or not to answer any questions during the course of the interview.
4. Seeking permission for interview to be recorded on audio and video tape.
5. Interview begins with first question.
6. What are the significant changes to Chinese culture, since the Communist came into power in 1949?
7. What kind of problems do participant face upon arrival in Singapore?
8. How do participant overcome problems encountered?
9. What are the long term intentions of participants after they graduate from Singapore?
10. What are the admission criteria for entry into university?
11. What kind of competition do students face, if any?
12. What are the school cultures like in Mainland China? (Such as: teacher-centred or student-centred).
13. How do students conduct their self-study? (Group or individual?)
14. What sacrifices are Mainland Chinese students willing to make to achieve their academic goals?
15. Why do Mainland Chinese university students choose to study in Singapore?
16. Why do they not choose to study in another country?
17. What are the perceptions of Mainland Chinese university students on Singapore's education?
18. Are there any differences in education between Mainland China and Singapore?
19. What is the teacher and student relationship like in Mainland China?
20. Are there any cultural differences between the people of both countries?

21. Why did they not choose to study in the best universities in their own country?
22. What is the learning culture like in Mainland China?
23. What is the time allocated to learning (on a daily basis)?
24. What are the perceptions of Mainland Chinese university students of their lecturers in Singapore?

Appendix 'B'

Interview questions for first data collection exercise.

1. How would you describe the education environment in your home country?
2. How would you describe the classroom (teaching & learning) environment in your home country?
3. What do you think are the main reason(s) that prompted you to continue your education overseas?
4. How would you describe the strengths and weaknesses of your country's education and higher education system as it affects you?
5. How would you compare the differences with Singapore's education and higher education system as it affects you?
6. In your opinion, which is the most important quality that you look for in higher education?
7. What was it in Singapore that attracted you to further your education here?
8. Why did you not choose another country to study in instead of Singapore?
9. How many hours do you spend in class everyday? (Such as: how many hours in lectures, tutoring and free time).
10. How well do you cope with and understand the language used in class? (Such as: spoken and written English).
11. Do teachers in Singapore use a different style of teaching from Mainland China? If so, how do you adapt to the new style of teaching in class? (Was or is it difficult?).
12. How do you describe the conditions for study in Singapore universities?
13. How many extra hours, on average, do you spent on self-study after your normal lectures?

14. Do you normally study alone or in a group?
15. Where do you normally do your study after your normal lectures? (E.g. in the campus and outside the campus.)
16. How would you describe the environment where you study after your normal classes? (E.g. in the campus and outside the campus.)
17. What do you think of Singapore as a place to continue your study? What kind of difficulties, if any, do you face by being away from home and in Singapore?
17. Do you have anxieties about studying in Singapore? If so, how do you cope with your anxieties in university and at home in Singapore?
18. How would you describe your present living conditions? Do you find they affect your study?
19. What is your opinion about Singapore being a place for study, now that you've experienced it?

Appendix 'C'

Interview questions for second data collection exercise

1. The Mainland Chinese government had spent billions of Yuan in education reform, since 1985, how do you think this has helped improve school administration?
2. How has the reform helped to improve teaching and learning?
3. The Mainland Chinese government is making great efforts in the education reform; Why do Mainland Chinese students still go overseas for studies in large numbers?
4. How would you describe Chinese societal culture?
5. How does societal culture influence your decision to seek education overseas?
6. What do you think your prospects would be when you return home after your graduation?
7. If you are given a similar opportunity to study in another Asian countries or Non-Western European countries, would you accept it and why?
8. What did your parents, teachers and classmates say about your decision to study in Singapore?
9. How do you think a degree from a Singapore University will benefit your social status in China?
10. What was the atmosphere like at home, when you return for the first time since you left China?
11. What were your most difficult moments during your study in Singapore?
12. How did you cope with 'Singlish' and 'Expression'?
13. What are the social consequences for those students who fail?

14. How do you think the new study environment in Singapore has benefited you in your study?
15. What would you do to perform better than you did last semester?
16. How do you think the environment can be improved to help you in your study?
17. What do you like or dislike most about your education in Singapore?
18. What do you think Singapore can do to attract more Chinese students?

Appendix 'D'

Hourly summary of diary

Diary of GR1(1)

Date of recording: 18 Oct 2004

Time	Details of activities	Coding
6.00am	Sleeping	Sleep
7.00am	Sleeping and got up at 7:30	Sleep; Time awake
8.00am	Had breaking while going to school, then physics lecture	Breakfast; Lecture
9.00am	Physics lecture	Lecture
10.00am	Physics lecture and then break, then math lecture	Lecture; Rest; Lecture
11.00am	Math lecture and then break for lunch	Lecture; Lunch
12.00pm	Study, then went for the Tuition Grant	Self-study; Tuition grant application
1.00pm	Chatting with friends In the lecture theatre.	Socialising
2.00pm	Economics lecture	Lecture
3.00pm	Economics lecture and then finishing lesson for today	Lecture
4.00pm	Chatting with friends for an hour	Socialising
5.00pm	Come back to hall to study for tomorrow's quiz	Self-study
6.00pm	Dine with my friend for one hour	Dinner; Socialising
7.00pm	Sleep	Rest
8.00pm	Study	Self-study
9.00pm	Study then exercise, then bathe	Exercise; Hygiene
10.00pm	Study	Self-study
11.00pm	Study	Self-study
12.00am	Study	Self-study
1.00am	Study	Self-study
2.00am	Study	Self-study
3.00am	Sleep	Sleep

4.00 _{am}	Sleep	Sleep
5.00 _{am}	Sleep	Sleep

Signature of participant

Date:

Appendix 'E'

Daily summary of weekly dairy

Diary of GR1(1)

Date of recording: 18 Oct 2004

Summary of the day's activities	Coding
Sleep well, never woke up	Sleep
Still a bit sleepy, time goes too fast in the morning, hahah	Lack of sleep
The bread was good, I always think so. It's a bit far to walk to school every morning from my hall, but good exercise!	Good breakfast; Good attitude
I seemed to understand all the lecturer talked about, just never felt anything while he spoke, don't know why, maybe a bit tired.	Inattentive; Tired
My TG haven't arrived yet, a bit worried, for have to sign by tomorrow. Check with the post office, no result! Ah.....	Concern;
The math lecturer was a bit slow for me, but I couldn't study while he spoke, so felt a bit sleepy. The lunch was good.	Inattentive; Tired; Good lunch.
I just study for a while then found that the queue for TG was so long, I didn't have my TG yet, just nervously checked with the MOE officers what I should do, luckily, seemed to be ok!	Self-study; Concern; Concern addressed
Planned to study in MLT, but the lights went out, so just stayed there chatting with my friends, listening to his story about his army life, quite interesting!	Socialising
Econs is my favourite, but today's topic was a bit difficult, then felt a sleepy, but luckily didn't sleep!	Lesson difficulty; Inattentive
I didn't worry about understanding econs, later I read the textbook, should be able to handle it!	Diligent;
On the way back met some of my Chinese friends, haven't talked for long, so chatted for an hour, felt much better!	Socialising; Happy
Tomorrow got two quiz, so have to revise.	Self-study
Eating was my favourite! Then chatting also!	Meals; Socialising
Continue studying, but seemed not to be very efficient. So	Self-study;

better sleep for a while.	Inattentive; Rest
Felt more in the mood of studying now.	Rejuvenated; Self-study
Got to exercise in order to keep fit and healthy.	Exercise
Cant feel anything, just study lah!	Self-study
Same	Self-study
A bit tired, chatted with my neighbour for a while.	Tired; Socialising
Went on studying.	Self-study
A bit late now, need to sleep.	Sleep

Please use a new copy to continue, if necessary.

Signature of participant

Date:

Appendix 'F'

Summary of Participants' personal profile

Participants' Code Name	Age	Marital status	Gender	University in Singapore	University Status Scholarship/ Tuition Grant/ Self-sponsored
GR1(1)	19	Single	Male	NTU	Full scholarship
GR1(2)	19	Single	Female	NTU	Full scholarship
GR1(3)	19	Single	Female	NTU	Full scholarship
GR1(4)	18	Single	Female	NTU	Full scholarship
GR1(5)	20	Single	Male	NTU	Full scholarship
GR1(6)	19	Single	Male	NTU	Full scholarship
GR1(7)	19	Single	Female	NIE	Full scholarship
GR1(8)	20	Single	Male	NTU	Tuition Grant
GR1(9)	19	Single	Male	NTU	Tuition Grant
GR1(9)+	21	Single	Male	NTU	Tuition Grant
GR1(10)	19	Single	Female	NTU	Tuition Grant
GR1(11)	18	Single	Female	NIE	Full scholarship
GR1(12)	19	Single	Male	NTU	Full scholarship
GR2(13)	>21	Married	Female	NUS	Full scholarship
GR2(14)	21	Single	Female	NUS	Self-sponsored
GR2(15)	21	Single	Female	NUS	Full scholarship
GR2(16)	>21	Single	Male	NUS	Full scholarship
GR2(17)	23	Single	Male	NUS	Full scholarship
GR2(17)+	34	Married	Male	NUS	Self-sponsored
GR2(18)	22	Single	Female	NUS	Full scholarship
GR2(19)	24	Single	Male	NUS	Self-sponsored
GR2(20)	>21	Single	Male	NUS	Full scholarship

Appendix 'G'

Consent Letter

Particulars of participant

Name of student: _____ Date of birth: ____/____/____.
(Please write clearly in English) (dd / mm / yy)

from: _____, _____, People's Republic of
China. (City) (Province)

Address in Singapore:

Contact number in Singapore:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Re: Letter of consent

This is to confirm that I, the above-named, volunteer to participate in the research thesis of Mr. Jason Ong, an Ed. D student of Leicester University, U.K.

I agree that all information provided by me in the project is of my own free will and it can be used for any publication relating to the thesis.

(Signature of student)

Date:

If you are below the age of 21, please request your guardian to fill-in the following part.

I, _____, passport or NRIC No: _____,

the guardian of the above student hereby give consent to participate in the said research project.

(Signature of guardian)

Date:

Appendix 'H'

Summary of records for 'audit trail'

Details	References	Arch File Name	Soft-copy File Name
Code name for NTU (NIE) participants	GR1(1) to GR1(12)	Ed.D Participants	Ed.D Participants
Code name for NUS participants	GR2(13) to GR2(20)	Ed.D Participants	Ed.D Participants
Transcript – Exercise 1	TR/E1/Code Name	Transcript – E1	Transcript E1
Diary – Exercise 1	DRY/E1/Code Name	Diary – E1	Diary E1
Transcript – Exercise 2	TR/E2/Code Name	Transcript – E2	Transcript E2
Transcript – Exercise 2	DRY/E2/Code Name	Diary – E2	Diary E2
TM: Push Factors	TM/OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/TM
TM: Limitations	TM/OC/TR/E2	Coding File	Code/TM
CN: Funding limitations	OC/TR/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Admission limitations	OC/TR/E1/GR1	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Teaching & Learning limitations	OC/TR/E1/GR1	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Research limitations	OC/TR/E1/GR2	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Societal culture limitations	OC/TR/E2	Coding File	Code/CN

TM Pull Factors (Attraction - Other countries)	TM/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/TM
CN: Best education	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Best research facilities	OC/TR	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Most powerful country	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Best economy	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Best opportunities	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
TM: Pull Factors (Attraction – Singapore)	OC/TR/E1	Coding File	Code/TM
CN: Tuition grants	OC/TR/E1	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Scholarship	OC/TR/E1	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Low cost	OC/TR/E1	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Recommendations	OC/TR/E1	Coding File	Code/CN
TM: Individual resilience	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/TM
CN: Education in Singapore	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Research environment	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Living in Singapore	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Social environment	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Personal improvements	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Perceptions of Singapore.	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
TM: Future Intentions	OC/TR/E2	Coding File	Code/TM
CN: Remain in Singapore (for different reasons)	OC/TR/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Return to China (for different reasons)	OC/TR/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
CN: Go to 3 rd country (for different reasons)	OC/TR/E2	Coding File	Code/CN
MM: Interview/E1	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/MM
MM: Interview/E2	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/MM
MM: Diary/E1	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/MM

MM: Diary/E2	OC/TR/E1/E2	Coding File	Code/MM
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(1) CN = Code Notes; (2) TM = Theoretical Memos (3) MM = Memos (4) TR = Transcript; (5) E1 = Exercise 1 (6) E2 = Exercise 2 (7) OC = Open Coding

Appendix 'I'

The problematic nature of societal culture in educational research.

Throughout this study, societal culture has been implicated as an influential factor in the way Mainland Chinese university students study in Singapore, and how they cope with the many challenges of daily study. Relatively little study of the influence of societal culture on teaching, learning and leadership exists. K. M. Cheng called this 'the neglected dimension involving cultural comparison in educational administration' (Cheng, 1995). While this research implicates societal culture as an important influence in the education environment, it remains an obscure concept. This addendum traces some of the difficulties in investigating societal culture, beginning with an understanding of its definition.

Culture in itself is a complex and complicated phenomenon. It permeates all level of societies and the institutions. In defining culture, Hofstede (1980, p. 25) citing Kluckhohn (1951) states:

Culture consists of patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values.

However, Dimmock (2000) argues that “Culture is a difficult phenomenon to measure, gauge or even describe” (p. 50). For one thing, cultures change over time, some faster, and others slower, than expected. Walker & Dimmock (2000) explain that culture exists at societal, local, national and organisational levels. As Dimmock & Walker (2000, p. 114) argue, societal cultures do change – some more quickly than others. The mainland Chinese culture is developing rapidly at present alongside economic and political change. In organisational cultures, Hofstede (1991) explains that they are forged, managed and grounded in practice. This means the organisation culture may change very quickly to suit the economic objectives. Societal cultures, on the other hand, as Hofstede asserts, are rooted in more enduring values and beliefs. They respond slowly to changes. The speed of change notwithstanding, problems for researchers of understanding culture and its influence – are manifold.

In investigating societal cultures, the researchers need to be familiar with the language of the subject before in-depth study can be made possible. As this study has shown, qualitative researchers need to build ‘intimate’ relationships with the participants before they (Mainland Chinese) are willing divulge any ‘intimate’ details about their culture. And after having gone through all the difficulties in investigating the phenomenon of societal culture, one may find that it no longer applies over a period of time because cultures do mutate or change with time at varying speed. An example of this is Hofstede’s (1980) classification of China as a collectivist society. The findings in this study have shown that Hofstede’s classification of Mainland Chinese as a collective society may no longer apply to the education environment today. This study among others, has shown that Mainland Chinese students studying overseas demonstrate rather private, fiercely individualistic and even competitive behaviour in their approach to study. This means that cultural stereotyping can be misleading, and cultural borrowing – the globalisation of policy and practice – can often lead to cultural mismatch and failure of successful adoption. As Cheng (1998) argues:

Education is a socio-cultural process. ...implementation of foreign educational policies and practices could result in a subsequent shift in the value system of society. The receiving society may not, however, be prepared (or able)

to undertake such a fundamental change despite the desired change in policy outcomes...' (pp. 11-30).

Most English language literature on Chinese and East Asian cultures has been disseminated by Western researchers, especially of Anglo American origin. Some of this literature has been criticised by Chinese and East Asian scholars as arrogantly biased (Walker & Dimmock, 1999). This perhaps explains why Westerners are often ignorant of Chinese and East Asian cultures. The ignorance could be due to the lack of information which in turn highlights the difficulties that researchers often face in investigating societal cultures.

The fundamental purpose of education institutions often differs from the profit-oriented organisations, such as IBM. It would therefore be difficult to apply Hofstede's cultural dimensions universally in the education environment. As Dimmock (2000, p. 43) argues: '...schools are products of their unique histories and distinctive societal cultures.'

The need for rigorous definition and study of societal culture, and cross-cultural comparison, has never been greater. The measurement of societal cultures for comparative purposes is fraught with difficulty. Hofstede's use of dimensions – now increasingly criticised – still remains just about the best measure around. A new set of dimensions that are appropriate to conduct cross-cultural comparative study for educational administration and policy – is timely. Dimmock & Walker (1998), have made a start in this respect – they draw on the definition of Hofstede (1980) and have regrouped Hofstede's five cultural dimensions into six dimensions specifically for the use of comparative study in the educational environment, especially in education leadership and policies. [See Dimmock, 2000, pp. 39-62 for comparison of Hofstede's (1980) five cultural dimensions against Dimmock & Walker's (1998) six dimensions].

A better understanding of culture and the way in which principals, teachers and students are influenced by their societal cultures would help the formulation of better policies. Dimmock & Walker (2000, pp. 110-116) stress that 'the influence of societal culture on educational leadership is complex and confusing'. As this study has shown, unless the Chinese trust you, they will not share with you the intimate details of their life or people. The problem for the researcher is to build trust – and this needs time and

commitment, a luxury that many researchers do not have. With these caveats, this study has found that the use of a grounded theory approach is well suited to capturing the intimacy and sensitivity of societal cultures.

GOD made all things beautiful in His time.