MANAGING CHINESE EMPLOYEES: DIALOGUES FROM THE NOTION OF SELF

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Abstract

This thesis explores cross-cultural management from an employee's perspective. It investigates how Chinese employees make sense of their selves in relation to their expatriate managers and to their work in multinational companies (MNCs).

After three decades of reforms, China has become a major player in the global economy. Many MNCs have established businesses there. Their operations in China have presented human resource management challenges. To date, most relevant studies were based solely on managerial responses, where the voice of the employees is often marginalised or absent. This study seeks to position the research subject, Chinese employees, at the centre of the discursive space of this thesis, where their previously deprived voice will be accounted for.

The methodology is derived from hermeneutics. In-depth interviews with Chinese employees working in MNCs were conducted. Seven themes have emerged from interviews, which broadly fall into the following: supervisor-supervisee relationship, working in MNCs, and the organisational practice.

The findings show that "harmony" and "respect" were most valued by the interviewees when they handled differences with their managers. The interviewees perceived that competent supervisors would show "care and concern" and "trust" to subordinates. Additionally, the findings suggest that "development opportunities offered by the MNC" and "fairness exercised in the MNC" were the main reasons for them to join MNCs. The findings also indicate that "less complicated human relationship" was the most attractive aspect about their companies.

Drawing from the notion of self from both western and Chinese perspectives to interpret the findings, the thesis reveals possible limits of research often conducted by researchers following conventional (western) conceptual frameworks. The thesis produces insights by following ideas from Chinese sources. While the data is interpreted from a western perspective, there lies its limit. An attempt to re-interpret the data from a Chinese perspective generates further layers of meaning. The latter would be missed, if western conceptual frameworks alone were applied.

This study contributes to our understanding of the research subject. Valuable insights are gained into managing Chinese employees; and, practical implications are considered. Regarding methodology, the study lends support to a central position of postcolonial writers, namely, non-western subjects be allowed to speak in their own terms so that their lived experience is no longer unjustly ignored. As the 'self' is constituted by being in relation with the 'other', the study arrives at a self-other integration, and suggests that such integration be pursued in future research. The integration requires researchers to, firstly, question what is lacking in interpreting non-western subjects from conventional theoretical frameworks, and secondly, to experiment with alternative frameworks so as to initiate dialogues. In attempting such dialogues, supplementary explanations and understanding about the subject can be sought and, indeed, recovered.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Cross-cultural workplace—the problem of "asymmetrical understanding"

In recent decades, competition among corporations has gone from national level to international level. As business becomes increasingly global, it is common for managers of international corporations to move from one region to another to work with people from different countries. To what extent would expatriates familiarise themselves with the culture and language of their host country before taking an overseas assignment? It is suspected that many expatriates may presuppose that their own culture and its socially construed concepts of reality are the norm. Therefore, they may hold a view that their way of perceiving things represents 'common sense' and their practice is the 'logical' way to do things. If the views and practices of the locals are different from theirs, then they may interpret the locals as 'lacking common sense and logic'. Some expatriates may stereotype their local colleagues and subordinates based on some fragmented, outdated, and even opinionated descriptions that may be derived from individual experience and observation (Li and Kleiner, 2001).

Although the works of some researchers (e.g. Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980, 1991) have provided explanations for the cultural differences that may help expatriate managers understand the host culture, the work of these researchers sometimes seem to 'understate' the cultural complexities. Besides, it is suspected that, for example, Hofstede's cultural dimensions may be incompatible with many Asian attitudes and practices (Wong, 2005). There are important Chinese concepts like *renqing* (humanity) and *he* (harmony) that expatriate managers may miss if they only follow the suggestions based on these researchers' works.

It seems that while expatriates may have little knowledge about the behaviour of locals, the locals probably understand more of western management practices which they learn through education and training for their career development. Such uneven effort in understanding between expatriates and locals is similar to the imbalanced understanding between non-western and western feminist intellectual exchanges that Shih (2002) observed. Shih coined a term "asymmetrical cosmopolitanism" to describe the situation in which non-western feminists are required to be knowledgeable about western cultures and speak one cosmopolitan language for an intellectual exchange to take place, whereas the reverse is not required. In other words, western feminists do not need to know the culture or speak the language of the other with whom they have an intellectual exchange.

This "asymmetrical understanding" is observed in the cross-cultural workplace in China. Since the economic reform three decades ago, China has become a major player in the global economy. As a result, many multi-national corporations (MNCs) found their ways to infiltrate the China market, and cross-cultural encounters in the workplace are increasingly frequent today. Entering the China market may provide a high profit margin to these MNCs; however, it could also bring new challenges to these corporations in managing their human resources. The challenges might become difficult to tackle when there is an "asymmetrical understanding".

The rise of China as an economic power also arouses research interest in corporations in China. Li and Tsui (2002) found 226 articles reporting on research about Chinese enterprises in 20 leading English language journals between 1984 and 1999, and 70% of them were published in the second half of the period. However, despite the growing research interests, few cross-cultural human resource management studies contribute to overcoming the "asymmetrical understanding" between expatriate managers and Chinese employees. The "voice of those at the receiving end" (Clark et al., 1998) seems to be ignored in the empirical studies on human resource practices in MNCs operating in China, as the majority of the studies done are from a managerial perspective and the Chinese employees are regarded as an object that does not have a voice.

1.2 Formulation of the research question

This thesis aims to contribute towards filling this research gap by exploring the human resource management issues in MNCs operating in China from a Chinese employee's perspective. It seeks to answer the key research question:

- How do Chinese employees make sense of their selves in relation to their expatriate managers and their work life in MNCs?

There are three components in the research question: the first one is the notion of self, the second one is the relation between the self—the employee—and the other—the expatriate manager, and the third one is work life.

While there are few studies on "asymmetrical understanding" in cross-cultural human resource management research, such studies could be found in other areas, like cross-cultural communication. For example, Xu and Zhang (2005) explore the "asymmetrical understanding" between Chinese and non-Chinese MBA students studying in the UK. They argue that ignoring the voice of the Chinese subject in the encounter is at the heart of the problem of "asymmetrical understanding". Therefore, to overcome "asymmetrical understanding" between the Chinese and non-Chinese MBA students and engage the participants in a meaningful dialogue, Xu and Zhang argue that the 'Chinese voice' should be accounted for in the group.

Xu and Zhang are not the first researchers to attempt bringing the voice of the deprived or marginalised into a dialogue. Postcolonial writers (e.g. Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978) recognise that the discursive space has been dominated by the West, and that the voices of the non-western others have been silenced or marginalised. Therefore, they advocate clearing a space to allow multiple voices, especially those that have been long deprived of being heard. In their studies, postcolonial researchers like Banerjee (2000, 2003) and Prasad (1997, 2003, 2006) demonstrate how the voice of the marginalised could be brought into the centre of the discursive space in management studies where a conversation or dialogue can take place.

Following the above researchers' lead, this thesis attempts to reach a meaningful dialogue between Chinese employees and expatriate managers by engaging the voice of the Chinese employees in the discursive space.

This thesis attempts to create a platform for meaningful dialogues to take place between the Chinese (the marginalised) and the western (the dominant) voices. These dialogues occur at three levels: one is on human resource management issues between the practitioners—Chinese employees and expatriate managers; the other two take place in the research communities: at theoretical and methodological levels.

1.3 An exploratory research approach

The study adopts a qualitative approach in collecting data through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. As this study intends to demonstrate an alternative perspective—a perspective from Chinese employees—to supplement the seemingly dominant managerial perspective in examining the human resource management issues, hermeneutics is applied for this research. The prominent characteristic of this research method is the advocation of bringing in different perspectives in interpreting the phenomenon under examination. It encourages dialogues between the perspectives so as to derive a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Moreover, instead of treating a non-western subject as if it were an object and did not have a voice, this study attempts to illustrate how a non-western subject—the Chinese employees in the study—could be allowed to speak on its own terms. To do this, the study introduces non-western sources—the Confucian and Taoist frameworks.

1.4 Significance of the study and justification

Potentially, this study could make contributions to relevant cross-cultural management research and impact on management practice.

March (2004), though not showing how it could be done, suggests that the emergence of Chinese scholarship, or works done in Chinese contexts, may offer some stimulation in the research communities dominated by conceptual frameworks that developed and originated from the West. These stimulations may offer insights and a possible alternative direction for research, enriching the studies done by the research communities. Responding to March's suggestion, this study aims to offer new ideas or insights in cross-cultural management studies that may benefit the research communities by studying the lived experience of Chinese employees and introducing Chinese conceptual frameworks in interpreting the Chinese research subject.

The study attempts to make a contribution to theoretical knowledge by providing a chance to scrutinise the notion of self from both Western and Chinese perspectives. To understand how a person acts and interprets his or her own environment, it is important to know how he or she defines and understands his or her self. Therefore, a discussion on the notion of self would help understand the research subject's perception. While the notion of self is a well-established topic in social sciences, it seems that the notion of self is rarely discussed from a Chinese perspective. Therefore, in addition to discussing the notion of self from a conventional western perspective, this study examines the notion from an alternative source—a Chinese perspective—which may add layers to the understanding of the notion.

The study also aims to contribute insights into research methodology. It attempts to lend support to the argument of postcolonial writers that the voices of non-western subjects are often marginalised or even silenced. In response to the argument, this study attempts to explore ways on how the voices of non-western subjects could be brought to the centre of the discursive space. To do so, this study first critically reviews the conventional conceptual frameworks. Through the review, the study discusses the possible limitations of researchers following conventional frameworks. The study then introduces and experiments with non-western conceptual frameworks to see how the voices of non-western subjects could be heard and understood in alternative frameworks.

In the business field, this study attempts to provide new information that could enhance the human resource management of MNCs operating in China. It allows a platform for Chinese employees to narrate their experiences in the workplace, which helps shed light on managing human resources in China. As mentioned in Section 1.2, a large number of studies done in the area of human resource management are from a managerial perspective. Therefore, examining the issues from an employee perspective would lead to new insights to the issues. Discussing the human resource management issues from a Chinese employee's perspective would help the expatriate management of MNCs see how these concepts affect these employees' work attitude and behaviour. Such information would enhance expatriates' understanding of Chinese employees and offer some insights on how they could manage their local staff.

1.5 Thesis structure

This thesis will be presented in nine chapters. The first introduces the study and the thesis as a whole. The rest of this thesis serves to answer the key research question in Section 1.2.

The next two chapters are the literature review. Chapter 2 first critically evaluates the practices of managing human resources in FIEs in China, which is helpful for understanding the context of this study. Then, it discusses the problems in the existing research justifying this study on managing Chinese employees.

Chapter 3 introduces the notion of self from western and Chinese perspectives by providing conceptual frameworks for interpreting the research subject. The first part examines the notion of self from a western perspective. The works of Giddens (1991), Taylor (1989), and Ricoeur (1992) are introduced. The second part scrutinises the notion from a Chinese perspective, and Confucian and Taoist frameworks are considered.

Chapter 4 justifies the choice of methodology. It starts with a brief account of the ontological and epistemological issues explaining the use of a qualitative research approach for the study. It then proceeds to explore hermeneutics as a research method. Towards the end of the chapter, a brief account on the research procedure is given.

The next two chapters present and analyse the findings. Chapter 5 reports the findings of this study, which allows the voice of the Chinese employees to be heard by revealing their concerns in three aspects: supervisor and supervisee relationship, job and career, and the practices of the organisation.

In Chapter 6, the findings are first interpreted from the conceptual frameworks of Giddens, Taylor, and Ricoeur. The findings are then interpreted from the Confucian and Taoist conceptual frameworks to see to what extent additional insights could be produced.

Chapter 7 presents an experiment at dialogue on the notion of self between the western and the Chinese conceptual frameworks. The dialogue is to establish what the common focal points of interest are, what is absent in one which is found in the other, and what is crucial to one but less important in the other. The knowledge gained here helps shed some light on understanding the research subject—Chinese employees.

Chapter 8 reflects on the implications of the study at theoretical, methodological, and practical levels. For theoretical implications, drawing on the notion of self, the study discusses the limit of western conceptual frameworks and the benefits of introducing Chinese sources that can offer alternative conceptual frameworks. Regarding methodology, the study considers how non-western subjects could be allowed to speak in their own terms by understanding them from their culture and language. As for practical implications, plausible suggestions concerning the human resource issues are made.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by summarising the whole study, outlining the contributions, spelling out the limitations of the research, and suggesting future research directions.

Chapter 2: Managing Chinese Employees

2.1 Introduction

China started its economic reform process when it opened itself to foreign investments in the late 1970s. Since then, China has experienced a sustained period of economic growth and its gross domestic product (GDP) growth exceeded 7 percent in eight of the past ten years (Dorfman, 2010), and this performance has exceeded that of most other developing countries. China's growth rate even doubled or trebled those achieved by most western economies in recent years (Harrison, 2005). The enormous potential of China's domestic market of more than 1.3 billion people, together with its abundant labour, has attracted many foreign investors into the Chinese market. As a result of foreign direct investment (FDI) flooding into the country, China took over the USA's position and became the country that had the world's largest FDI flows in 2002 (Lieberthal & Lieberthal, 2003). Despite the large drop recorded in August 2008 after the financial crisis, China's FDI rebounded quickly after the crisis (Li & Si, 2009). Due to China's fast growing economy, an increasing number of foreign corporations have found ways to infiltrate the Chinese market. In 2009, there were 11,225 foreign-invested enterprises (FIEs) in Beijing (Bureau of Statistics of Beijing, 2010) and 9,250 in Guangzhou (Bureau of Statistics of Guangzhou, 2010).

As Ding et al. (2000) pointed out, the economic reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 brought about changes in managing human resources in China. On account of the increasing number of foreign-invested enterprises, these changes began to take root in the late 1980s. In the 1990s, it became increasingly recognised that a company's human resource management is crucial for the success of the company (Chow, 2004; Law, Tse, & Zhou, 2003; Yu & Egri, 2005) and—partly under the influence of FIEs—state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and privately-owned enterprises (POEs) in China are moving away from personnel management (PM) to human resource management (HRM).

This chapter first discusses what has been written about the practices in managing human resources in FIEs operating in China (see Table 2.1, pp. 28–29), which is helpful for understanding the broad context for this study. It also highlights the recent problems that FIEs have encountered when managing their human resources. Then it examines the drawbacks of previous research in the area showing the need for new research.

2.2 Managing human resources in foreign-invested enterprises

Since implementing the Open Door Policy in the late 1970s, China has been in transition from "a centrally planned command economy to a market-driven economy" (Zhu & Dowling, 2000). The following offers an account of the practices of managing Chinese employees, particularly in FIEs in China, during this transition. The account is divided into three periods: the early period after the economic reform (1978–1989), the period before China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) (1990–2000), and the period after China joined the WTO (2001–present).

2.2.1 JVs and the legacy of SOEs

Until the late 1970s, the presence of FDI in China was quite limited (Rovai, 2005). When China implemented new economic reforms and adopted the Open Door Policy in 1978, Economic Zones were established to attract FDI (Wong & Slater, 2002). In 1979, the passing of the Joint Venture Law allowed FIEs to invest in China in the form of JVs (Braun & Warner, 2002), and in 1986, FIEs were permitted to operate in a form of wholly foreign-owned enterprises (WFOEs) (Gamble, 2000). Unlike SOEs, FIEs have been allowed more autonomy in managing their staff since the day they first entered the Chinese market (Goodall & Warner, 1997; Zhu & Dowling, 2002). FIEs were required to comply with less stringent government regulations and they were given autonomy to employ or dismiss staff, and determine wage levels (Ouyang, 1988). Therefore, staff management practices adopted in SOEs like central job allocation, 'iron rice-bowl' which ensured jobs for life, and 'cradle to grave' welfare that provided housing and medical welfare to the employees of the unit were not used in FIEs. However, as FIEs were still affected by the planned economic system adopted in China, staff management practices in FIEs in this period tended to be rather straightforward and were mainly concerned with administering employees (McComb, 1999).

2.2.1.1 Recruitment and dismissal

Based on relevant literature, published cases, and his own personal contacts with expatriates from JVs in China, Tsang (1994) reviewed the practices in managing staff in joint ventures (JVs) in this period. During this period, the Chinese partner of a JV was usually a SOE in the same industry. JVs were allowed to recruit employees from the outside without the help of their Chinese partner by advertising in local newspapers, and the employees were then hired on contract. The FIEs could sign either a collective contract with the trade union or individual contracts with their employees. Therefore, theoretically, FIEs enjoyed greater freedom to select their own employees. However, in reality, most of the staff in JVs, especially experienced technicians, professionals, and managers, were recruited 'internally': they came from the Chinese partner. The main reason was the difficulty of finding the right person and having him or her transferred from his or her previous employer. There was a system of keeping a person's personnel file with various government bodies for the purpose of social control during that time. If the employer did not agree, the employee's personnel file could not be transferred to a new employer, and without the transfer of the personnel file, the employee would not be able to take up a new job.

During this period, FIEs were not only granted the right for open recruitment, but also allowed the freedom to dismiss employees (Child, 1994). According to joint venture regulations, a JV could dismiss an employee if he or she was made redundant because of changes in production and technical conditions, or if he or she could not meet the requirements of the new jobs after training. However, Tsang (1994) pointed out that, in reality, a JV still could not dismiss employees without seeking the prior approval of the local labour bureau and consensus from its local partner. Very often, both were resistant towards dismissing employees, thinking that it might cause serious unemployment problems. Therefore, Tsang contended that dismissing an employee was more difficult than hiring an employee, as the local labour bureau was usually resistant to dismissing workers.

2.2.1.2 Remuneration

Another shift in the practices in managing staff was in the nature of the reward system. Before the economic reforms, the structure of the reward system was flat which reflected the egalitarian mentality of a communist system, and wage differentials between different positions were intentionally kept low (Warner, 1995). Changes in the reward system gradually took place along with the massive influx of FIEs. Instead of adopting the traditional practices like 'iron rice-bowl' employment and 'cradle to grave' welfare, FIEs offered complete wage packages containing the basic wage, bonuses, and subsidies (e.g., insurance, welfare, pension, and housing allowance) (Tsang, 1994). In 1980, Regulations for the Management of Foreign Joint Ventures were set and required FIEs to set their wage levels at 120–150 per cent of those of SOEs (Zhu & Dowling, 2000). The rationale for the higher wages in FIEs was that these organisations generally required their employees to have greater skills. In fact, many FIEs welcomed this requirement, as they believed that this would help them attract and retain good staff. In his study on six FIEs, Warner (1993) contended that the salaries in FIEs were set higher in order to compensate for their employees' job insecurity such that they needed to put up with working in a FIE instead of an SOE. Joining an FIE meant that they could no longer enjoy the guarantee of lifetime employment. Despite this, skilled workers left SOEs to join FIEs in the hope that they would receive better payment and benefits (Zhao, 1994).

2.2.1.3 Promotion

Another 'new' practice in this period was the promotion system which took the employees' performance into account. Before the economic reforms, age probably was the only predictor of an employee's wage and seniority in his or her job position (Benson et al., 2000). The new practice for promotion included performance, which was seen as individual effort, and employees learnt that their performance would lead to promotion and other desirable outcomes like higher pay. On top of performance, criteria for promotion also included advanced education level and training (Benson et al., 2000; Björkman & Lu, 2000).

The introduction of this new practice was not smooth as it met resistance from employees. The tension caused between young and old employees might have been the reason for the resistance (Tsang, 1994). As Tsang (1994) pointed out, the emphasis on seniority was consistent with the Chinese traditional respect of 'elders' who were supposed to have more experience and wisdom. However, the performance-based promotion approach adopted in FIEs 'violated' this tradition. Resentment might arise when young Chinese were promoted to a more senior position than that of their former supervisors. These supervisors might feel that they were losing their face, and this could jeopardise the harmonious atmosphere in the workplace. To compensate these supervisors' 'loss', some FIEs paid them more than their younger colleagues holding the same position (Tsang, 1994), in the form of age-related and service-time wages (Warner, 1997).

2.2.2 A system in transition

During the period between 1990 and 2000, many laws were passed to consolidate the human resource practices introduced in FIEs in the early period. For example, the 1994 Labour Law consolidated the contract system authorising fixed-term labour contracts (Warner, 1996). With the introduction of the 'new' law, human resource practices, such as dismissing an employee and making him or her redundant, were 'regulated'. By this time, many 'new' practices introduced in the early period, such as signing labour contracts with employees, became common practices in FIEs (Goodall & Warner, 1997). During the 1990s there was a trend of moving towards human resource management, which focuses on human capital development, and away from personnel management, which only emphasises administrative work like filing and controlling personal archives (Cooke, 2005).

2.2.2.1 Recruitment

Based on the results of eight independent research studies done in this period, Hassard et al. (2004) pointed out that a variety of recruitment methods were used by FIEs. With their autonomy, though personal contacts and referrals from employees still seemed to play a role, recruitment was often done through the external labour market, such as job centres and local labour bureaus, advertising in the local media, and campus recruitment (Björkman & Lu, 2000; Braun & Warner, 2002; Ding et al., 2000; Hassard et al., 2004).

In addition to the company's website, some organisations also used Internet job sites, such as '51job.com' and 'ChinaHR.com', for recruiting employees for junior positions (Melvin, 2000); however, they still preferred recruitment seminars or relied on head hunts to fill managerial positions (Yang et al., 1999). In their interviews with the enterprise directors and personnel managers from 12 JVs, Ding and Warner (1999) found that job-fairs and campus recruitment were mostly used for recruiting line-workers, whereas internal promotion was the most common source for recruiting managers. In his study of 29 FIEs, Gamble (2000) analysed that FIEs preferred to recruit graduates direct from educational and technical institutions through campus recruitment. They claimed that one advantage of employing fresh graduates was that these graduates were not spoilt by working in SOEs, and would not bring undesirable management practices into the workplace.

However, not all FIEs were completely exempt from government control. In a survey conducted between 1994–1995 in three major Chinese cities (Shanghai, Nanjing, and Tianjin), Zhu and Dowling (2002) found that some FIEs still received government-allocated personnel and had employees who inherited jobs. These FIEs were all JVs with SOEs as their partners and were under 'pressure' to accept employees transferred from the SOEs. The local partners perceived that employees recruited internally were more loyal to the organisation and would be easier to retain in the JV (Björkman & Lu, 1999; Goodall & Warner, 1997). Despite this, the staffing practices in this period were still steadily moving away from the central control of the government. The 12 JVs that participated in the study conducted by Braun and Warner (2002) did not report any pressure from their local partners in the recruitment process. Not only were the organisations (including FIEs and SOEs) allowed, at least in theory, to recruit their employees, but employees also enjoyed greater freedom in selecting their jobs, enabling them to take their own interests and values into consideration when searching for a job (Wong & Slater, 2002), especially when the labour contract system became compulsory in all sectors (Branine, 1997) and the Chinese government officially announced that labour mobility should be encouraged and an individual's discretion for his or her job selection should be respected (Zhao, 1994).

2.2.2.2 Remuneration

With the massive influx of FIEs, local employees became more used to changes in the reward system including a new salary system, higher salary differentials, and performance-based pay. The issuance of the Labour Law in 1994 allowed FIEs to adhere to the minimum wage regulation, but Zhu and Dowling (2000) found that the JVs in their sample had a higher wage level than the SOEs did. Based on the findings in their study of eight FIEs, Goodall and Warner (1997) argued that the higher salaries set in FIEs reflected severe competition among organisations for a limited supply of experienced employees. This was supported by the study conducted by Chiu et al. (2002). In their questionnaire survey of 121 companies operating in mainland China, cash-based compensation components were found to be the most important factors in retaining and motivating Chinese employees. However, Tomlinson (1997) argued that a great emphasis on material incentives plus the absence of career development could be the reason for the high turnover rates observed in many FIEs. In fact, Goodall and Warner (1998) also found that some companies in their survey realised this and refused to use monetary compensation as their recruitment or retention tool; instead they turned to training as the solution to the problem of high turnover.

Starting from the early 1980s, material rewards became more predominant. FIEs introduced a 'post-plus-skill' and performance-based system in which position and skills determined the basic wage and bonus (Goodall & Warner, 1997; Warner, 1997). Employees were expected to meet specific performance criteria, and their wages and bonus were tied to their individual performance (Westwood & Lok, 2003) which contributed to salary differentials. In their interviews with managers from 65 JVs, Björkman and Lu (2000) found that although the system met resistance from the employees, with enough explanation and a just distribution of the rewards, employees in FIEs gradually accepted the system. Managers claimed that employees were more aware that their performance would lead to desirable outcomes such as higher pay or a promotion.

However, the pay differentials between local and expatriate staff could be a source of resentment. Although FIEs had good reasons for the pay differentials, such as expatriate managers having a higher living standard in their home country and being required to play the role of management trainer as well, local employees might feel some bitterness towards the arrangement (Gamble, 2000).

2.2.2.3 Appraisal and promotion

The periodic appraisal system was widely used in FIEs as they regarded the performance appraisal system as being important in helping Chinese employees see taking personal responsibility as essential for their own success, as well as that of their department and company (Björkman & Lu, 1999). However, local employees were not completely comfortable with the system, as for a long time there had been a lack of rigorous performance systems in place (Zhu & Dowling, 1998). One of the expatriate managers interviewed by Björkman and Lu (1999) pointed out that local employees were not used to direct criticism, and he advised that the appraiser needed to be sensitive to Chinese values. Similarly, the results of Braun and Warner's study (2002) also showed that very few companies made explicit attempts to adjust the appraisal system to the local culture. Therefore, the researchers called for improvement in this area. Björkman and Lu (1999) recommended that the appraisal methods should be adjusted to fit central Chinese values such as 'harmony' and 'face' better.

The performance appraisal system not only had an impact on employees' rewards, but it also had an influence on their promotion. Promotion in FIEs during this period was mainly based on employees' performance. While promotion could contribute to a harmonious internal atmosphere and served as an important step towards the localisation of a company's operation, it could also be a source for conflict between expatriates and locals (Björkman & Lu, 1999).

2.2.3 On the track of international practices

With China's entry to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, China has increased its attractiveness towards foreign investors. Many FIEs, partly in response to the WTO agreements, continued to expand their operation in China (Ahlstrom et al., 2001) and increased levels of investment were observed (Vogler, 2003). This resulted in greater competitive pressure among the companies, including FIEs, already established in China. The competition caused existing problems in the human resource management practices in FIEs, such as recruitment, retention and localisation, to become more acute. Recruitment and retention, in fact, were regarded as the biggest HRM challenges for FIEs in China ("China's people problem", 2005; Taylor, 2006), and they remain the most severe HR problems today.

2.2.3.1 Recruitment

In the 1990s, when the number of FIEs increased and the number of qualified professionals and managers was limited, many firms reported recruiting suitable staff, especially at the senior level, as the number one HRM problem (Björkman & Lu, 1999). The problem became severe with China's entry to the WTO. FIEs competed with each other as well as with local enterprises for the same talented employees (Leininger, 2004).

The shortage of qualified talent in China has been attributed to its traditional education system which emphasises memorisation (Ahlstrom et al., 2001; Björkman & Lu, 1999) and the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976 which wiped out a generation of management potential ("China's people problem", 2005). Besides, statistics showed that 30 percent of the professionals and managers in China had received higher education. For those who had received higher education, not many were trained in western management skills and possessed the specific technical and human skills (Rovai, 2005). The Ministry of Personnel in China also admitted "... the high level talents in enterprises remain far from enough to meet the nation's need..." (Xinhuanet, 2004). The staff shortage has threatened FIEs' plans for extending their operations in China. As a result, it calls for FIEs to derive more sophisticated recruitment strategies to compete for talent.

To understand how companies met the HR challenges in China's transitional process, Rovai used multiple in-depth interviews to collect data from one FIE. Rovai found in her study that the FIE interviewed used campus recruitment and website applications for its graduate recruitment, which were similar to the methods used in the 1990s. However, she also found that the company used new recruitment strategies. The company made use of the importance of *guanxi* in China and formed partnerships with key universities to promote the company among their graduates. The company also used internships as one recruitment method, which it regarded as one of the most effective methods to find appropriate staff for the company.

As for recruiting experienced personnel, methods like job-fairs, personal contacts and referrals, and web applications were still in use (Dessler, 2006), but headhunting services had become one of the main channels. In their study, Ahlstrom et al. (2001) interviewed managers and consultants from 12 FIEs and three consulting firms, and most of them reported that head-hunt agents were employed by their company to locate quality employees. Although these interviewees admitted that it was time-consuming, they found that it was helpful in forming a suitable work force. In another study by Rovai (2008), the FIE she studied emphasised the importance of keeping the company's brand image in the local market so as to attract talent. This seems to be related to the Chinese value of 'face'.

To compete for talent, many FIEs also focused on providing an attractive remuneration as their recruitment strategy. To attract talent, many companies offered a very high salary. In a survey conducted by the human resource company Hudson (Xinhuanet, 2008a), 32 percent of the employers were reported to have planned to raise salaries by at least 20 percent to attract badly-need talent. However, some companies have also realised that employees, now employed on a contractual basis, would not hesitate to resign and seek job opportunities in other companies that could offer them higher rewards. In the survey, 18 percent of the respondents believed that the high turnover rate resulted from dissatisfaction over money. Instead of ending up in wage wars and significantly increasing the cost for human resources, some companies offered career development opportunities (Rovai, 2005) and social benefits, such as housing, pension, and medical (Melvin, 2001) to attract talent. Some HR managers in FIEs also emphasised the importance of publicising the company's brand image; for example, in providing the best remuneration and career development possibilities in the local market to attract talent (Rovai, 2008).

2.2.3.2 Retention

In their interviews with managers in 47 UK-owned subsidiaries in China conducted in 2003, Wilkinson et al. (2005) found that 17 FIEs had problems with recruitment and retention. Since it was difficult to recruit suitable staff, these FIEs tried their best to retain their experienced employees, especially since retaining staff probably costs less than recruiting staff. However, the increasingly flexible labour market in China, reflected by the phenomenon of job hopping, meant that the retention of employees had become a concern for FIEs, especially those in large cities, like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, first tier cities, where competition was keen for skilled workers and experienced professionals (Bao, 2010; Zhu & Warner, 2005).

The high turnover rate further exacerbates the staff shortage. The "2010 spring job-hopping trend" survey conducted by Zhaopin.com (Bao, 2010), one of the largest human resource services providers in China, reported that 35.8 percent of the 7,000 respondents said that the limited opportunity for career development was their reason for seeking alternative employment, and 25.3 percent of the respondents quoted unfavourable compensation and benefits as their reason. Some FIEs were aware of these reasons and in response they derived career-oriented benefit strategies for retaining their experienced staff (Zhou et al., 2005). Some companies offered career development plans tailored to individuals to develop their competencies (Melvin, 2001; Rovai, 2005). When creating the plans, individuals' career interests, aspirations, and performance were taken into account (Dessler, 2006). According to Mercer Human Resource Consulting LLC, employees would have greater loyalty to the company if the company cared about their interest (Melvin, 2001; Purdum, 2005).

One of the managers interviewed in Rovai's study (2005) said that providing development opportunities through training to employees showed the company's commitment to its staff. In Braun and Warner's study (2002), most employers reported the use of both external and internal training. The company in Rovai's study provided educational assistance for MBAs and PhDs as external training for its staff, sent staff overseas for training, and used job assignments for internal training. However, Zhou et al. (2005) suspected that such internal training opportunities were rare in China.

In response to employees' concerns about compensation and benefits, some FIEs provided incentives on top of salary like bonus and stock options, though some HR managers said that young people might not be too enthusiastic about options (Gauthier, 2001; Melvin, 2001). Companies also offered benefits like housing or provided help to employees with their mortgages (Purdum, 2005), and medical and unemployment insurance payments (Braun & Warner, 2002). It seemed that this solution was effective in helping them retain their staff. The managers of the FIEs that participated in the questionnaire survey conducted by Chiu et al. (2002) reported that Chinese employees valued compensation items that would satisfy their basic needs, such as wages, bonuses, and housing. While this solution seemed to be effective, Chiu et al. (2002) warned FIEs that people's needs and preferences might change over time. When employees had more money, they might turn their attention to other needs. In fact, the "2010 Spring Job-hopping Trend" survey by Zhaopin.com (Bao, 2010) already showed that employees regarded development opportunities as more important than compensation and benefits.

2.2.3.3 Promotion and localisation

Another challenge that FIEs needed to deal with was the issue of localisation. There were a number of reasons for FIEs to localise their management in China. The first one was that it helped them overcome language and cultural barriers (Selmer, 2004). Some FIEs believed that it was easier for local managers than expatriate managers to build up personal and business contacts, since *guanxi* is very important in the Chinese culture, and Chinese employees were used to the practice (Selmer, 2004; Wong & Slater, 2002). Cost was also one of the factors for the localisation of management (Zhou et al., 2005). Besides, localisation might enhance the morale of local employees as it meant that they had more opportunities for career development, and that it might also help retain them (Melvin, 2001). In line with this, in his study of two of the largest US-based companies and their contractor plants in Southern China, Frenkel (2001) found that local middle managers generally believed that more mainland Chinese staff promoted to middle or senior management could help nurture a more harmonious work atmosphere and reduce the tension between the senior management dominated by expatriates and the junior local managers.

Despite the fact that there were a number of advantages brought by localisation, there were also disadvantages. For example, locals might not know the culture of the parent company; therefore, there could be barriers in communication between locals and the parent company (Selmer, 2004), Based on data collected from 29 FIEs, Gamble (2000) argued that localisation might not ensure effective business operation of FIEs. Unlike expatriate managers, local managers might not have much experience working in a large international corporation and might not be aware of a wider global strategic plan. Additionally, expatriate managers not only played an important role in passing knowledge to local employees on the parent company's strategy and culture (Gamble, 2000), but also fulfilled an essential role to ensure that local managers would not jeopardise the interest of the organisation by accommodating their own interests (Gamble, 2000; Warner, 2004). Therefore, it was argued that maintaining the presence of expatriate managers in FIEs was important. However, such argument seems to suggest that there is no trust from expatriates towards locals.

In addition, FIE's decisions to localise their management in China did not receive full support from their expatriate managers. In his questionnaire survey of 165 expatriates, Selmer (2004) found that the first reason for expatriates' reservation was self-interest. The FIEs could not expect their expatriate managers to be very enthusiastic about the prospect of making themselves redundant. Some of them might want to stay on; therefore, they were reluctant to localise. Even if it was not for self-interest, some of them were not convinced that localisation would benefit their companies, at least not in the near future. Another reason was related to the ability of these expatriate managers. Some had reservations about their role as a trainer for local managers, as they may lack the communication skills needed to be a trainer. Additionally, lack of time was another possible factor for their unwillingness. Some expatriate managers might be too busy with their own responsibilities and tasks already, whereas others might have just been sent to China for a brief assignment. However, lack of support from the expatriate managers would affect the success of the company's localisation strategy (Law et al., 2009).

In addition to the resistance from expatriates, a limited supply of qualified local managers also contributed to the difficulties in localisation for FIEs (Rovai, 2005). Many researchers (e.g., Ahlstrom et al., 2001; Wong & Slater, 2002) attributed the shortage to the changes in the scope of managerial responsibilities brought about by the economic reform. Before the economic reform and even in the early period after the reform, managers were only skilful operators and administrators (Bu, 1994). However, FIEs now required their managers to do much more than what managers did before. Managers were expected, for example, to recognise market opportunities, find ways to secure the finances of their organisations, and think strategically to match the competition from their rivals. Unfortunately, the skills and experience that local managers had did not quite match the new roles they needed to play in FIEs (Ahlstrom et al., 2001).

Given the difficulties in localising the management in FIEs, Chinese employees might have a perception that there was a 'glass ceiling' for them (Leininger, 2004). As Gamble (2000) pointed out, such a perception may de-motivate Chinese employees and increase turnover. Experienced local managers who perceived that they had reached the 'glass ceiling' and could not break through it might simply leave the company. Therefore, it is important for FIEs to develop their local employees through training programmes, internally or externally, and prepare them for promotion. Unfortunately, there was little evidence that many FIEs were systematically adopting this approach (Gamble, 2000).

2.2.3.4 Supervisor-supervisee relationship

HR practices in recruitment, remuneration, retention, and localisation bring challenges to the supervisor and supervisee relationship, especially the imbalance of power within the relation. As management is given the autonomy to recruit and dismiss staff, determine wage levels, decide on employees' opportunity for promotion, and other welfare entitlements, management power has expanded. Without 'protection' from the state, employees have now become increasingly passive and vulnerable (Zhu & Warner, 2005) and this in turn might create tension in the supervisor and supervisee relationship, especially when the supervisor is an expatriate and the supervisee is a local—there might be more distrust between the two parties, such as the perceived 'glass ceiling' and other unfair treatments caused by favouritism (Hassard et al., 2004).

While locals were not satisfied with the training or promotion opportunities, expatriates were not completely happy with local staff. They complained that the locals were reluctant to take up independent decision-making responsibility and risk adverse expression of opinion (Gamble, 2000). The locals were also perceived as lacking initiative and analytical skills. Some expatriate managers commented that Chinese employees could be good at what they do, but were unwilling to give opinions or question things (Wilkinson et al., 2005).

Björkman and Lu (1999) and Ahlstrom et al. (2001) attributed this to the lack of experience and training as the locals were not required to do so in the earlier days. They also blamed the Chinese education system which is based on lectures emphasising learning by rote rather than by participation. Wilkinson et al. (2005) suggested that another contributing factor was the face issue in the Chinese culture. They argued that local employees might feel that they would embarrass others if they dug into problems, as this is impolite and undesirable.

In their study, Wong et al. (2003) showed that the relationship between the supervisor and supervisee would affect the employee's trust in his or her supervisor and organisation and, in turn, affect his or her commitment to the organisation. Therefore, it seems to be crucial for FIEs to help improve the supervisor-supervisee relationship between the expatriate management and local employees.

2.3 Problems with the mainstream research

A number of problems occur in the existing research, which suggests that a further study should be conducted to reach a new understanding of managing human resources in FIEs in China. The first problem is that not many studies have been done in the recent period. As the competition among companies is increasing after China's entry to WTO in 2001, it is expected that this will have an impact on human resource practices. Thus, an updated investigation of the practices is needed.

The second problem is related to the research methods used in the previous research. The majority of the research studies employed quantitative research using large-scale questionnaire surveys (e.g., Chiu et al., 2002; Selmer, 2004; Yu & Egri, 2005; Zhu et al., 2005) (see Table 2.2, pp. 30–31), and only a very few studies used qualitative research methodologies (e.g., Gamble, 2000, 2003, 2006; Rovai, 2005; Zhou et al., 2005). Among those studies in which a qualitative methodology was employed, many were just concerned with reporting the human resource practices used by FIEs, and very few (e.g., Gamble, 2003, 2006) generated in-depth information about the issues related to managing Chinese employees. Therefore, a detailed qualitative study will add value to the existing literature by exploring the issues in depth.

The third problem is related to an "asymmetrical understanding" offered by the previous research. The majority of the studies were based solely on managerial responses through interviews with managers (e.g., Ding & Warner, 1999; Rovai, 2005; Selmer, 2004) while excluding the voices of employees. Moreover, extremely few (e.g., Gamble, 2003, 2006; Yu & Egri, 2005) included the "voice those at the receiving end" (Clark et al., 1998). A study allowing the voice from the other side; that is, of the employees, to be heard, will help overcome this "asymmetrical understanding" and provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has given a brief account of the practices in managing human resources in FIEs operating in China. The account covers the period starting from the economic reforms introduced in 1978 to the present divided into three parts: the early period after the economic reform (1978–1989), the period before China joined the WTO (1990–2000), and the period after China joined the WTO (2001– present).

It is clear that human resource management practices in the workplace have changed a lot over the last 20 years compared with the old practices. The changes have also brought about challenges in recruitment, retention, localisation, and supervisor-supervisee relationships in MNCs, and these challenges are proving to remain formidable since China's entry to the WTO. This research aims to help the expatriate management of FIEs find solutions for these problems related to managing Chinese employees.

Considering the problems in the mainstream research, this study adopts a qualitative approach in collecting data from Chinese employees working in MNCs. Through the data, the study aims to help the expatriate management of these organisations gain a comprehensive understanding of their local employees by finding out how Chinese employees perceive and cope with the changes in the workplace.

Table 2.1: Major HR practices in the three periods

HR Practices	Early period	The period of transition	The period after China's entry to the WTO
Recruitment	• Theoretically, FIEs enjoyed greater freedom in selecting and dismissing their employees. • In reality, most of the staff in JVs were recruited 'internally'. • In reality, JVs still could not dismiss employees without seeking the prior approval of the local labour bureau and consensus from their local partner.	• FIEs could really adopt the open recruitment policy using a variety of recruitment methods. • Recruitment was often done through, for example, job centres and local labour bureaus, advertising in the local media, and campus recruitment. • Signing labour contracts with employees became a common practice.	• Open recruitment and contract system were still used. • With the keen competition brought by the entry to the WTO, FIEs were facing the challenges of recruiting suitable employees, as well as keeping their experienced staff. • To attract talent, FIEs derived more sophisticated recruitment strategies, such as forming partnership with key universities.
Remuneration	• The Chinese regulations required FIEs to set their wage level at 120-150 per cent of that of SOEs. • Instead of a 'iron rice-bowl' employment and 'cradle to grave' welfare system, FIEs offered Chinese employees a complete wage package containing the basic wage, bonuses, and subsidies (e.g. pension, and housing allowance). • The better payment and benefits offered by FIEs attracted many skilled workers from SOEs.	• Local employees were more used to the new reward system including higher salary differentials, and a performance-based pay. • Cash-based compensation components were perceived as the most important factors in motivating Chinese employees. • Some FIEs saw that a high emphasis on material incentives plus the absence of career development could be the reason for the high turnover rates • The pay differentials between local and expatriate staff could be a source of resentment.	• As FIEs were completing for talent and struggling to keep their experienced Chinese employees, they offered a competitive salary or reward package including share options, housing schemes, and supplementary pension plans for staff retention. • The reward package seemed to be effective in helping FIEs retain their staff at the moment, but surveys showed that more and more experienced Chinese employees had turned their attention to other needs, such as career development. • In response, some FIEs derived career-oriented benefit strategy to recruit and retain talent.

HR Practices	Early period	The period of transition	The period after China's entry to the WTO
Promotion	• A new promotion system which took the employees' performance into account was introduced. • This practice met resistance from employees. • Some FIEs paid more to the older employees than their younger colleagues holding the same position, in the form of age-related and service-time wages, so as to appease these employees.	• Promotion in FIEs in this period was mainly based on employees' performance. • The periodic appraisal system was widely used in FIEs but local employees were not completely comfortable with the system. • Promotion served as an important step for localization, but could be a source for conflicts between expatriates and locals.	• Many FIEs intended to localise their management. • However, FIEs found a lot of difficulties in localising their staff. • Resistance from expatriates and a limited supply of qualified local managers were two commonly quoted difficulties. • Chinese employees had a perception that there is a 'glass ceiling' for them and when they believed that they had reached the 'glass ceiling' and could break through it might simply leave the company.

Table 2.2: A summary of empirical studies on HR practices in FIEs in China

Researcher	Research subject	Research method	Area of research
Sweeney (1996)	89 expatriate and 68 local managers of JVs	Questionnaire survey	Strategic changes in HR management, such as recruitment and training
Ding, Fields, & Akhtar (1997)	158 managers of FIEs in Shenzen	Questionnaire survey	HR practices including recruitment, compensation, training, performance appraisal, promotion
Goodall & Warner (1997)	Senior executives, line managers, personnel specialists and trade union representatives of 7 JVs in Beijing and Shanghai	Case study	HR practices including , labour contract, compensation, trade union, HR policies
Warner (1997)	Senior managers, HR directors, Union representatives, workers' representatives of 6 JVs	Case study	Management-labour relations and HR practices including recruitment, reward systems and training,
Goodall & Warner (1998)	HR directors of 20 FIEs in Shanghai	Questionnaire survey and interviews	HRM dilemmas in recruitment, compensation and localisation
Bjӧrkman & Lu (1999)	General or HR managers of 65 JVs	Questionnaire survey and interviews	HR practices including recruitment, training, appraisal system, compensation and retention
Ding & Warner (1999)	Enterprise directors, personnel managers and trade union officials of 12 JVs (and 12 SOEs) in Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangzhou & Chongqing	Interviews	Industrial relations and HR practices including recruitment, selection and remuneration
Benson, Debroux, Yuasa, & Zhu (2000)	Senior managers, HR managers and union leaders of 3 JVs (and 3 SOEs)	Case study	HR practices including recruitment, training, remuneration and industrial relations
Gamble (2000)	Expatriate managers and senior local managers of 29 FIEs	Interviews	Localisation
Ahlstrom, Bruton, & Chan (2001)	Managers and consultants of 12 FIEs (and 3 local consulting firms)	Interviews	HR challenges including selection, training, appraisal, reward, retention and socialization
Bjӧrkman & Lu (2001)	General managers, HR/personnel managers and deputy general managers of 63 JVs	Questionnaire survey and interviews	HR practices including recruitment, training, financial compensation and promotion
Ding & Akhtar (2001)	General managers and HR directors of 326 JVs (and SOEs) in Shanghai, Nanjing and Guangzhou	Questionnaire survey	HR practices in recruitment, training, remuneration and retention
Bjӧrkman & Fan (2002)	HR or personnel managers of 62 JVs	Questionnaire survey	Relationship between HR management and organisational performance

Researcher	Research subject	Research method	Area of research
Braun & Warner (2002)	HR managers of12 MNCs	Case study	HR practices including recruitment, performance appraisal, training and compensation
Chiu, Luk, & Tang (2002)	121 general or HR managers of MNCs	Questionnaire survey	Compensation
Zhu & Dowling (2002)	440 HR managers of FIEs (SOEs, POEs and COEs) in Shanghai, Nanjing and Tianjin	Questionnaire survey	HR practices including recruitment and selection in transition
Gamble (2003)	375 employees from all levels of an MNC	Case study	Transfer of HR practices including reward system and training
Chow (2004)	HR professionals, experts and consultants	Interviews, focus groups	HR practices including staffing, training and development, performance evaluation and compensation
Law, Wong, & Wang (2004)	139 HR managers of FIEs in Fujian	Questionnaire survey	Localisation
Selmer (2004)	165 expatriate managers and CEOs of FIEs in Beijing, Shanghai and Guanagzhou	Questionnaire survey	Localisation
Rovai (2005)	HR managers of an MNC	Case study	HR practices including recruitment and retention
Wilkinson, Eberhardt, McLarend, & Millington (2005)	Managers of 47 FIEs	Interviews	HR practices such as recruitment and retention and partnership sourcing
Yu & Egri (2005)	113 line-workers and supervisors of JVs (and SOEs)	Questionnaire survey	Employee satisfaction with HRM systems and affect organisational commitment
Zhou, Lu, & Jiang (2005)	High-level executives of 3 MNCs	Case study	Staff management including communication, performance evaluation, recruitment and retention
Zhu, Cooper, de Cieri, & Dowling (2005)	850 managers of FIEs (SOEs, POEs and COEs) in the first survey 900 managers of FIEs (SOEs, POEs and COEs) in the second survey	Two questionnaire surveys	HR practices including recruitment, compensation, training and performance appraisal of the changing business environment
Gamble (2006)	290 employees of an MNC and 94 employees of a SOE	Case study	Transfer of HR practices
Rovai (2008)	HR directors, managers and professionals of an MNC	Case study	Recruitment
Law, Song, Wong, & Chen (2009)	229 HR managers of MNCs	Questionnaire survey	Localisation

Chapter 3: The Notion of Self—Western and Chinese Perspectives

3.1 Introduction

To understand how Chinese employees perceive and cope with the changes in the workplace, we need to know who these employees are first; we may then be able to make sense of their behaviour. In other words, to understand how a person acts and interprets his or her environment, it would be helpful to understand how this person, he or she, defines and understands his or her self first.

The interest in the notion of self has a long history, and various people have asked the question "Who am I?". In ancient Greece, during the period that may be regarded as the beginning of the history of western ideas about the self, Plato argued for the existence of an immortal soul and, based on this metaphysical view, he further developed his discussion on the moral self (Taylor, 1989). Aristotle advocated a belief that humans naturally possess a unique, essential state of 'being' when he discussed the realisation of the self (Craig, 1998).

The discussion of selfhood is not unique in the West; it is also found in Chinese philosophical traditions. For example, according to the Confucian framework, a person's life is a realisation of an ideal conception of the self, which is implicit in certain moral desires that people have (Shun, 1991, p. 34), whether these desires pertain to humans by nature as suggested by Mencius[1] (372–289 BC) or are a product of one's upbringing as evoked by Xunzi[2] (313–238 BC) (Zhao & Zhao, 2003).

1 Mencius (Mengzi) (372–289 BC) was an itinerant Chinese philosopher, best known for his

2 Xunzi (313–238 BC) was a famous philosopher and educator in Zhanguo (the Warring States, 475–221 BC), best known for his claim that human nature is evil (xing ben e).

In this chapter, the notion of self will be first examined from a western perspective. The works of Giddens (1991), Taylor (1989), and Ricoeur (1992) are introduced. The notion will then be scrutinised from a Chinese perspective, and Confucian and Taoist frameworks are considered.

3.2 A western perspective

In the search for an answer to what constitutes the self, a diversity of views emerged. Lauritzen (1994) proposes that the views of the self can be divided into contrast, engagement, and disengagement. The view of the self as engaged (e.g., Riceour and Taylor) sees that there is a necessary connection between selfhood and the orientation to the good, where the beliefs within a framework of values define who the self is. The view of the self as disengaged (e.g., Giddens) sees that the self is at the centre—detached from any ties of constitutive value. The disengaged self leads to self-description because the self stands apart from any horizon of value.

In the following, the frameworks of Giddens (1991), Taylor (1989), and Riceour (1992) will be considered to see what they could offer to help understand Chinese employees—the research subject.

3.2.1 Giddens: the self as a reflexive project

Anthony Giddens (1938–) is one of the most influential contemporary sociologists. In *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Giddens (1991) argues for a sovereign self and opposes the view that the self is passive and determined by external influences. He suggests that individuals are autonomous in their formation of self through their on-going lifestyle choices.

3.2.1.1 Autonomous individuals

Giddens suggests that we have entered a period that is intrinsically dynamic. The modern world is a "runaway world"; not only is the pace of social change much faster than in any prior time, but also its scope and the profoundness with which it affects pre-existing social practices and modes of behaviour are wider.

In the modern world, social activity becomes complex as knowledge rapidly changes. Social life has detached and moved away from traditional regulations and established practices and new practices have emerged. For example, digital communication technology allows people from different parts of the world to work together seamlessly, 24 hours a day; traditional marriages are not a necessary basis for families; people can choose cohabitation where the relationship is not necessarily bound to heterosexual partners, but is also extended to homosexual partners; fast-food eating culture, and the rise of therapy and counselling of all kinds are all the products of modern times.

Under these circumstances, it is not obvious what individuals should do or be. As individuals are no longer bound by customs and traditions, nor are they restricted to ascribed social relations, they are free to decide on how they want to lead their lives and how they in teract with others. They are offered a spectrum of options and need to negotiate lifestyle choices personally among this diversity of options. These choices are more than just narrow lifestyle questions concerning clothing or appearance; they involve wider aspects including behaviour, attitude, and belief:

> "What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity – and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour." (p. 70)

These lifestyle choices do not necessarily link to moral evaluation with individuals making their choices based only on their own preference. Therefore, Gluck (1993) opines that Giddens' idea of lifestyle choices comes "dangerously close to confronting the modern self with the modern consumer" (p. 217).

As individuals are challenged by the dynamic characteristics of modernity, the loss of historical continuity, and the collapse of traditional organisations, some sociologists have concerns about individuals' construction of the self. For example, Lasch (1991) sees that in the modern period, which is dominated by external influences that individuals have no or little control of, people withdraw from the wider social context and retreat to purely personal preoccupations, thereby giving rise to a narcissistic self. For Sennett (1998), the constantly changing environment makes it impossible for individuals to build into their lives the sustaining values that allow them to construct their identities, resulting in a growing depression as people search in vain for a place to anchor a meaning for their lives. People therefore display the symptoms of "corrosion of character", and become a corrosive self. Although Giddens agrees that, "...self-identity becomes problematic in modernity in a way which contrasts with self–society relations in more traditional contexts" (p. 34), he takes an optimistic view of people making sense of their selves, putting the control in individuals. Giddens celebrates the freedom that individuals have in their choice to create and re-create themselves. He emphasises an autonomous consciousness and believes that individuals have control in constructing who they are.

3.2.1.2 Reflexivity and coherence

One can imagine the chronic dilemmas individuals face when confronted with a wide panorama of choices for their lifestyle, which are crucial for constructing their selves and reflecting on who they are. Giddens sees that facing a context of multiple choices, the self has to become a reflexive project in which individuals must actively choose, sustain, and constantly revise their own narrative of identity.

Giddens recognises that the dynamic consequences of modernity have led to a state of fragmentation and concedes that fragmentation can cause anxieties in individuals. He also acknowledges that without coherent and authentic regulations and practices embedded in tradition, ontological security can be at stake. However, he believes individuals are engaged in a reflexive project of self in which they reflexively construct who they are, thereby forming a coherent sense of self. This coherent sense of self is crucial in the changing world where traditional systems have collapsed, as the individual's coherent self which is "reflexively understood in terms of his or her biography" (p. 244), has become a source of continuity and trust. Moreover, this continuity and trust are the bases for individual ontological security.

For Giddens, individuals are actively involved in building and rebuilding a sense of coherent self, which serves as the authenticity for themselves. This self has to be continuously recreated and adjusted in the reflexive activities of individuals. The reflexive project not only seeks authenticity in the present, but also appropriates the past and predicts the future as it anticipates a coherent link among the past, present, and future. The aim of the reflexive project is to create ordered stories of the self, or in Giddens' term, the "narrative of self". Giddens suggests that the narrative of the self needs to be "shaped, altered and reflexively sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life" (p. 215). Why is it important for individuals to create reflexively ordered narratives of the self? Giddens believes it is crucial because, with a coherent narrative, individuals can have a coherent sense of self. To maintain the unity of the on-going story of self, individuals reflect on what lifestyle choices they need to make in their day-to-day activities. Confronted by a complex diversity of choices, it is therefore crucial to have life-planning:

> "In a world of alternative lifestyle options, strategic life-planning becomes of special importance. ... Life plans are the substantial content of the reflexively organized trajectory of the self." (p. 84)

Giddens posits that predictable routines arranged by life-planning are essential to sustaining a coherent sense of self when individuals are confronted with the plurality of choices in modern times. Although he does recognise the importance of help from others (i.e. experts) in the form of self-help manuals or therapies for individuals to maintain a unity in their on-going life story, he sees that the formation of self is internally referential and individuals only need to answer to themselves.

3.2.1.3 Pure relations

Giddens' framework shows that individuals are responsible for the constitution of their selves. His discussion on pure relations further confirms his view on the sole responsibility of individuals for their own formation of the self.

Individuals are no longer tied to each other in modern society by social or moral obligation. The relations they form with others are not externally conditioned; rather they are free-floating based on individual personal needs and pleasure:

> "… a pure relation is one in which external criteria have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship as such can deliver…" (p. 6)

These relations can be brief and temporary, they can also be long-term; one way or the other, it is a choice for individuals. The relations are marginalised and much more vulnerable. Clearly, pure relations are internally referential depending on the satisfaction and reward that is brought by the relations.

Pure relations are double-edged and full of contradiction and tension. On the one hand, the relation developed through voluntary commitments and an intensified intimacy can be an opportunity for the individuals involved to develop trust that needs to be earned and cannot be taken for granted. On the other hand, the relation can be voluntarily broken and is only "good until further notice" (1991, p. 187). To form a long-term relationship demands commitment, which puts pressure on individuals, and yet there is no guarantee that the relation will work. Therefore, it can be a source of anxiety for individuals.

3.2.1.4 Problems of Giddens' framework

Although Giddens creates a rather optimistic scenario of self formation in modernity, he in fact has left some questions unanswered. Giddens emphasises individuals' autonomy in forming their selves, suggesting that they have a range of options, but he does not really discuss what resources they can draw on to make this self-authoring of their selves possible and what criteria individuals should use to make choices in their lifestyle. For Giddens, key reference points for individuals attempting to sustain a coherent self are internal: personal integrity of the self that comes from creating a personal belief system that one's primary loyalty is to his or her own self. However, he does not explain how "being true to oneself" can help individuals construct their selves.

As pointed out above in his discussion on the relationship with others, Giddens shows that personal needs or pleasure are the reasons for individuals to commit to a relationship. External criteria like kinship, social duty, or traditional obligation cannot bind individuals to each other. It is evident that Giddens' discussion on individuals' relationship is more a demonstration to show how they choose their lifestyles than an argument to show how individuals' relationship with others helps the formation of their selves. This could be the fundamental weakness of his framework when employed to understand the formation of self in modern societies that include webs of relations. Thus, this is something that may need close attention.

To choose a framework to help understand Chinese employees, it seems reasonable to consider what is important in the Chinese context. In the Chinese context, it is commonly perceived that the moral aspect and the relation with others are very important in understanding a person's self. However, Giddens argues that the coherent self is the sole resource for the formation of the self without locating itself within a framework of values. This argument, together with his limited discussion on the relation with others, may make Giddens' framework insufficient for generating an understanding of the research subject—the Chinese employees. Nevertheless, credit should still be given to Giddens, as he brought to light how individuals can make sense of their selves.

Considering the insufficiency of Giddens' framework, the framework of Taylor (1989) is brought in for understanding the research subject.

3.2.2 Taylor: the self in a moral space

Charles Taylor (1931–) is one of the late twentieth-century philosophers who has made a significant contribution in the discussion on the notion of self in modern times (Craig, 1998). In his book *Sources of the Self* published in 1989, Taylor holds that he cannot answer the question "Who am I?" without visions of the good or value that involves individuals' sense of dignity and self-respect. He sees that individuals are morally challenged by many visions of the goods and constantly choose a good among an abundance of goods so as to define their selves.

3.2.2.1 Orientation to the good

According to Taylor, for individuals to make sense of who they are, they "need an orientation to the good" (p. 47). Without such an orientation, the self would be shattered causing an awful identity crisis. Unlike Giddens, he does not see an individual's everyday life as neutral and value-free; on the contrary, individuals need to experience their life in terms of values. In other words, individuals do not live in a neutral space, but a moral space in which they orient themselves when making lifestyle choices: what is good and what is bad; what is right and what is wrong. While individuals seem to be free to make their choices, Taylor does not agree that they are radically free. He sees that these choices are not solely from individual autonomy but are made according to the moral space in which individuals position themselves.

An individual's position in this moral space is defined by their need for orientation in life. This spatial orientation involves two aspects: an individual's knowledge of the moral space, and their positioning themselves in the known space. Taylor uses map reading to explain his argument. He says individuals need to find their orientation on the map (framework of values) and have a spatial awareness of it before they can navigate their way to find their destination (i.e. good and meaningful life).

Why is it important for individuals to position themselves in the moral space? Taylor argues that the moral space is related to the good which is "essential to being a human interlocutor capable of answering for oneself" (p. 29). When individuals recognise their position in the moral space, they will accept and be actively engaged with the "qualitative distinctions", the moral frameworks, associated with the space that they stand in.

Some people are clear about their frameworks, and are probably aware of how these affect their lives. However, Taylor acknowledges that some are not aware of their frameworks, and they need time to explore their frameworks. Taylor believes that these frameworks are not static; they can be changed, and in fact they keep on changing. When individuals interact with new things, encounter new ideologies, and have a new experience in their lives, then they may change their position in the moral space, and thus change their frameworks in turn. Some people may wait for new frameworks to emerge so that they can replace the existing ones. However, in most cases, individuals do not cut loose from their old frameworks; rather they integrate the new frameworks into the old ones, renouncing some parts of the old frameworks. Therefore, it is more like an evolution rather than a revolution.

Taylor's discussion on the frameworks individuals have and the possibility of reformulating these frameworks are important for explaining how individuals can make sense of their selves in the ever changing social environment. For some people who are deeply rooted in their frameworks, their frameworks are like a solid rock for them to uphold their sense of self and resist the impulsive forces of the maelstrom of their changing environment. For others, especially those who loosely connect themselves with their frameworks, reforming their frameworks by absorbing new philosophies or ideologies is necessary. Only by doing so can they make sense of their selves in the violent whirlpool of social life.

Individuals continue to go through a reformation of frameworks in the changing social environment. If individuals find that their frameworks can no longer help them define what is right or wrong; what is good or meaningful, and what is bad or trivial, they may lose their sense of self. They will experience an identity crisis when they do not know who they are. This is just like the experience that Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk, had. He experienced an identity crisis when he found himself assailed by doubts as to his salvation and the forgiveness of his sins. The theology and penitential practices at that time did little to ease his pain and vexation caused by these doubts (Craig, 1998). To help him redefine his self, he developed his own theological responses and eventually produced a theology of justification by faith, which served as his new framework to which he anchored himself.

3.2.2.2 Life goods, hypergoods and constitutive goods

Moral frameworks are frameworks of strong evaluation. For Taylor, strong evaluation is inescapable for individuals to make sense of their selves as it endows life with meaning and purpose. He suggests that individuals formulate who they are based on these frameworks. These frameworks serve as objective standards providing the horizon within which individuals can try to determine from case to case what is good or bad, or what ought to be done or let go, or what should be endorsed or opposed. These objective standards enable individuals to decide what makes life worth living, to make sense of their responses, and spell out what all of them "presupposes about ourselves and our situations" (p. 8).

Each framework consists of several life goods, facets, or components of a good life that are held together in a coherent relationship. Taylor reckons that in relation to a wide range of life goods, individuals create their selves. In his discussion on life goods, Taylor views that not all goods are equal and there are higher-ordered life goods. Taylor calls these higher-ordered goods hypergoods, "goods which not only are incomparably more important than others, but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about" (p. 63).

Three main hypergoods could be found in Taylor's discussion. The first one is benevolence, which calls upon individuals to care for justice and the well-being of others. Taylor suggests that this hypergood is accepted by many as their highest good and he refers it as a universal ethic. The second hypergood that Taylor traces is equal respect for all human beings regardless of their race, sex, religions and so on. Taylor indicates that the principle of equal respect is found in the challenge of hierarchical conceptions of society in early modern times and in the negation of the patriarchal social system that is currently changing the relations between the sexes. The third hypergood that Taylor discusses is autonomy, which he refers to as self-determining freedom. Such freedom allows individuals to create their unique selves freely.

Taylor believes that there could be tension or conflicts among the three hypergoods. When there are tensions among the hypergoods, especially when the hypergood of autonomy conflicts with the other two hypergoods, individuals need to decide which one they would affirm according to concrete situations. Their decision is based on how they want to create their selves in the face of diverse and conflicting hypergoods.

According to Taylor, individuals may not be taught these hypergoods explicitly, but individuals' lives are deeply interwoven with these hypergoods. The connection even starts when they are born. How they are brought up and the environment (e.g. practices, laws, culture) they are in when they are small could create these connections for them.

A hypergood is made possible by constitutive goods. For Taylor, a constitutive good is a moral source that gives meaning to the hypergoods and the other life goods within an individual's moral framework, and the love of a constitutive good "empowers us to be good" (p. 93). A constitutive good for individuals is basic to being responsible for themselves, and through embracing a constitutive good individuals build moral capacity and are inspired to live a good life.

Taylor contends that constitutive goods are more than personal desires; they are sources of moral motivation. These moral sources could be the traditional notions of the primacy of honour, the Christian culture of loyalty to the divine God, or the Platonic accounts of the virtues of reason and self-mastery. Since Taylor sees that there is no self without moral evaluation and the moral sources of these traditional views are no longer apparent, he encourages individuals to search for their own moral sources combining personal insight with visions of the good that may connect with outside sources as an internalised framework for evaluation.

In Taylor's view, the modern self is defined by three notions: first, a turn to inwardness, the sense of self with inward depth and dignity; second, the affirmation of ordinary life instead of the higher notions of the warrior or aristocratic ethic; third, a view of nature as a source for moral evaluation and self-identity.

3.2.2.3 Narrative and others

For individuals to make sense of their selves, they not only orient themselves to the good, but also understand their lives in a narrative. For Taylor, individuals' "sense of the good has to be woven into [their] understanding of [their lives] as an unfolding story" (p. 47): how they have become and where they are going. In other words, this unfolding story is constructed by projecting present actions into the future forming a unity of life—a life narrative.

A narrative is a condition of articulating the goods of frameworks. With the help of a narrative, an individual's implicit conceptions of the good can be made explicit to themselves and to others. It is evident that Taylor sees that the self is socially constituted. In interlocutions with others through a common language, individuals articulate their ideas of the good, construct and confirm their values and beliefs. For Taylor, the act of articulation formulates what individuals hold as important as well as their moral reactions. It gives individuals a reflective picture of life and helps them evaluate the good they hold. When individuals make effort to articulate their vision of the good, it allows their deepest moral instincts to surface. Sometimes it may mean to open up the possibility of discovering distortions in their moral values, distortions that will require them to reshape their vision of the good and search for a new one. Therefore, through reflexivity, individuals deepen their understanding of their moral values and strengthen their commitment to their vision of goods.

Taylor believes it is important to know that one is a self only among other selves, and a self can never be described without reference to those who surround it. One's self-definition finds its original sense in the interchanged of speakers that help define who one is by making reference to where one speaks from. For example, in the family, one can be a son to one's father, whereas in the work domain, one can be a subordinate to one's supervisor. If one wants to make sense of one's self, one has to know where one stands "as a potential interlocutor in a society of interlocutors" (p. 29). Therefore, the engagement of individuals with others is important in defining their selves.

Although people are more inclined to individualism in western cultures, the modern independence of the self is no negation of the fact that a self only exists among other selves. The relation with others is prominent in the Chinese context where the web of relationship has a significant place in the formation of self.

3.2.2.4 Strengths and weaknesses of Taylor's framework

Taylor provides a detailed discussion on the sources of self. He states that the position individuals place themselves in the moral space helps them determine their selves. This moral space, together with the associated frameworks (qualitative distinctions), seems to be the resources that individuals can rely on to make sense of their selves, which is what Giddens lacks. The frameworks, associated with the moral space, can help individuals live a 'good' life. Considering the moral aspect is commonly perceived as important in the Chinese context, Taylor's framework provides a possible foundation for understanding the research subject—Chinese employees.

However, there are weaknesses in Taylor's framework. Taylor's discussion on the self can only be understood as a western self. Taylor devotes a large part in *Sources of the Self* to show how the frameworks that have emerged in the ongoing history of the West, which begins with the Greeks, followed by the Christian culture, continuing on through the Modern philosophers, then ending with contemporary novelists, poets and visual artists, have helped form the identity of a western self[3]. It is suspected that the historical and cultural narratives that Taylor provides in his work would not be able to help understand

3 The word 'western' is used here in a loose sense. Undoubtedly, the self in, say, the European context, might be different from the self in, say, the American context.

a Chinese self. It therefore seems to be reasonable to understand the research subject, Chinese employees, from their own intellectual ground.

Besides, while Taylor suggests that a self exists among other selves and stresses the importance of engagement with others, there is little discussion on how others affect individuals' understanding of their selves. Instead, it seems that Taylor's discussion stresses more on the individual self; the relationship between the self and others is not the focus of interest in his framework. Assuming that the Chinese are relational, Taylor's framework would then be inadequate for us to understand how they make sense of their selves in the relation to others. Therefore, Ricoeur's framework (1992), which emphasises morality and the existence of other in the formation of self, is introduced for interpreting the research subject.

3.2.3 Ricoeur: narrativity, ethics and otherness of the self

Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), an influential philosopher, also lays a strong emphasis on morality in his discussion on the constitution of the self. What links morality to the self? In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur (1992) reveals the connection by first reconstructing a theory of narrative. To be able to answer the question "Who am I?", an individual needs to be able to attest himself or herself and be able to tell his or her story. In a narrative, an individual becomes a character and an agent of actions. By analysing the actions taken by the agent, the agent can be understood, thus answering the question of "who".

3.2.3.1 Identity and narrative

Ricoeur argues that the self, the agent of actions, has its own history and needs an identity that can "designate(...) itself in signifying the world" (p. 113). The identity of the self is constituted between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity.

Idem-identity refers a notion of identity based on sameness. According to Ricoeur, sameness is "a concept of relation and a relation of relations" (p. 116). With *idem*-identity, we can be sure that the two occurrences of an object do not imply that there are two different things, but the same thing. It also denotes a qualitative identity which means "extreme resemblance" (p. 116). It may be said that John and Peter are wearing the same suit if the suits are similar—that they are interchangeable without noticeable difference. However, it may still be difficult to recognise that the object is the same if there is a great distance of time. Therefore, it is important that there is an uninterrupted continuity across change. The uninterrupted continuity tolerates the "small changes which threaten resemblance without destroying it" (p. 117) and it makes it possible, for example, for a dog to be recognised as the same dog from its birth to its death.

Ipse-identity is described as selfhood, which maintains a constancy of self during the changes. Self-constancy means keeping one's word as it "stands as a challenge to time, a denial of change" (p. 124). Say a person has made a promise and after time his desires change, his habits change, and his identifications change; however, if he keeps his promise, he remains the same and proves himself to be trustworthy. Being faithful to himself or herself is for an individual to behave in a way that others can rely on him or her. Because of this, the permanence in time for persons can come in. Self-constancy allows a "sedimented" self, an inflexible self, to turn into the self that is capable of responding to a new initiative committing itself to new possibilities. Here, the self becomes another self without losing its personal identity.

Ricoeur argues that in "the dialectic of sameness and selfhood" the self acquires stability without being reduced to an object. The operation of this dialectic can best be demonstrated in the narrative. As discussed before, Taylor (1989) also talks about a narrative view of the self saying "this is to state another basic condition of making sense of ourselves, that we grasp our lives in a narrative" (p. 47). He says understanding our lives 'narratively' is not optional as "to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going" (p. 47). However, he does not take his readers any further about what he means by this narrative view of the self. Ricoeur (1992) takes Taylor's view further on this point. He explains in considerable detail how narratives contribute to the constitution of the self.

With the help of the two models of identity, the connection between the self and narrative can be seen. The establishment of dispositions through sedimentation implies a history of acquisition. Ricoeur explains:

> "It is then comprehensible that the stable pole of character can contain a narrative dimension, as we have seen in the uses of the term "character" identifying it with the protagonist in a story. What sedimentation has contracted, narration can redeploy. And it is dispositional language ...which paves the way for this narrative unfolding." (p. 122)

Narratives configure human actions and account for human existence in a temporal mode. Ricoeur sees narrative configuration as the "art of composition which mediates between concordance and discordance" (p. 141) through a process of 'emplotment'. This 'emplotment' confers the "unity, internal structure, and completeness" of a story and also confers on the person, as "the character preserves through the story an identity correlative to that of the story itself" (p. 143). Ricoeur calls this identity constructed by the narrative 'narrative identity', which allows an identity to embody both change and permanence.

Ricoeur's narrative theory supports Taylor's claim that selfhood and strong evaluation are necessarily linked, as narratives invite moral judgement. Ricoeur writes "in the exchange of experiences which the narrative performs, actions are always subject to approval or disapproval and agents to praise or blame" (p. 164). Through the telling or reading of a life-story, whether factual or fictional, the identity figure that emerges offers new insights into the self. The evaluation occurs in the space opened by a life-story of what a good life is. Allowing evaluation in the life-story, the narrative can finally perform its functions of discovery of and transformation in the self's value and moral judgement. Therefore, there are ethical dimensions in narratives.

3.2.3.2 Ethics and practical wisdom

Ricoeur suggests that narrative stands "at the crossroads of the theory of action and moral theory" (p. 170). He says that "the idea of gathering together one's life in the form of a narrative is defined to serve as a basis for the aim of 'good' life," (p. 158), which in turn is the cornerstone of his ethics. Ricoeur transfers his argument from narrative to the field of ethical action to answer the question "Who am I?" and the answer lies in one's response to the other—the ethical action.

For Ricoeur, ethics has its place within a philosophy of selfhood, and cannot be reduced to the question of moral obligation. He sees that ethics is "the aim of an accomplished life" (p. 170) and an ethical intention is to strive for "the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions" (p. 172). In other words, beyond the universality of the moral law, there is a call for a true and good life. Then, what is a 'good life'? Ricoeur says "the 'good life' is ... the nebulus of ideals and dreams of achievements with regard to which a life is held to be more or less fulfilled or unfulfilled" (p. 179). Each individual is responsible for developing his or her answer to the injunction to lead a good life, and there is a diversity of answers to the call for a good life.

The 'good life' requires the self to make decisions for its choices for what seems to be the best for itself to live well with regard to its life as a whole. This "living well" and "unity of life" require the self to estimate its own actions and evaluate itself as "the gaze of appraisal". Ricoeur suggests that the source for these estimations and evaluations is the internal good which serves as the initial support for the reflexive moment of self-esteem related to ethics. With self-esteem, an individual is able to attest himself or herself as being the worthy subject of a good life.

For a good life, an individual must have associates with and for whom he or she acts. Therefore, to "live well with and for others" (p. 239), individuals need to consider others and show respect for others in their course of action. Living a good life, individuals also aim to have institutions that meet their sense of justice, which in its full sense entails equality and care. Although striving for a good life is a personal responsibility, it has a strong notion of reciprocity. Reciprocity forms the basis of those relations central to ethics; namely friendship and justice. For Ricoeur, friendship and justice become the chief virtues because of their essential role in the well-being of selfhood.

From Ricoeur's discussion on the aim of good life, it is clear that he recognises there are three levels in an individual's ethical aim (Toscano, 2005). The first level is the preservation of the self. When an individual is able to show that he or she is able to sympathise with others and show them benevolent feelings, he or she is able to prove that he or she is worthy of a good life, thus the individual's self can be preserved. The second level is the recognition of the other. With the existence of the other, individuals are able to love and show solicitude—to have friendships. The third level is the exercising of justice. Justice sets a general standard for individuals to act objectively and impartially even to those whose faces they will never see.

Ricoeur posits that ethical aims are insufficient to guide individuals to proper conduct because the actual implication of any specific ethical aim could result in violence. Therefore, every actual aim must be submitted to "sieve of the norm" (p. 170). Respect for the norm will reach its full meaning only if it is based on a respect for others. At times that this sieve turns out to be insufficient to guide concrete conduct, however, Ricoeur advises individuals to appeal to their practical wisdom. For example, in those cases in which respect for others and respect for a universal law are in conflict, individuals need to rely on their practical wisdom for the resolution. According to Ricoeur, practical wisdom has three distinguishing features: first, it does not deny the principle of respect for others;

second, it always searches for a just means following the rules of justice; and third, it involves consultation with others. A person exercising practical wisdom will not act solely on his or her own, but will engage others in conversation.

3.2.3.3 Selfhood and otherness

No matter whether it is a discussion on narrative or a discussion on ethical aim, they both suggest that the other is important in the constitution of self. As Ricoeur says, "The selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other" (p. 3).

Why, then, is the other required along the route from the self's capacity of evaluating or judging itself to be good to the self's realisation of this capacity? As Ricoeur points out, "every action has its agents and its patients" (p. 155). This patient is the other to the agent, the self, and with the presence of the other, the self is able to act and give his or her sympathy and compassion. Individuals act on the demand of the other. Therefore, without the concept of the other, there is no ethics; without ethics, there is no self. In short, we can say that without the other, there is no self.

The self has the ability to suffer as well as to act. The suffering individual suggests the existence of otherness, as Ricoeur sees that "passivity becomes *the* attestation of otherness" (p. 318). The other as another individual is transformed into a self and becomes the agent, while the self is transformed into an other becoming the patient. In this reciprocity, the self is responsible to and for the other, and vice versa. The self must confront both the responsibility of acting and the uncertainty brought by the reception of the action from the agent. Being a suffering individual, the self feels its vulnerability in its exposure to others and to those actions of others by which it is affected. When we are able to see others as ourselves and ourselves as others, then we are concerned about them;

the suffering of others becomes our suffering, and their happiness becomes our happiness. For Ricoeur, "I cannot have self-esteem unless I esteem others as myself" (p. 193).

Ricoeur proposes that there are three types of otherness. The first otherness is related to one's own body. One's own body belongs to oneself, but it can also be categorised as an object belonging to the world. Therefore, in a sense, one's body is the other, which has an integral relationship with the self. The second otherness exists in the interpersonal relationship. This is the 'immediate other' who is another "flesh" and does not belong to the self. The third otherness is found in the intrapersonal relationship in the wider community or even the universe; the 'distant other'. Unlike the second other, the third other does not need to have any face-to-face contact with the self, and very often it exists as a third party, maybe in the form of a social norm or social conscience, or "God—living God, absent God—or an empty place" (p. 355). Both the second and the third other can be transformed into a self of reciprocity which forms the basis of productive and self-affirming relations. Individuals make sense of their selves and become who they are through relations with others whether in the instance of their own body or another's body, or "the Other on the strictly philosophical plane" (p. 355).

3.2.3.4 Strengths and weaknesses of Ricoeur's framework

Considering ethical aspects and relations with others are perceived as important in the Chinese context, Riceour's framework, in many ways, is the best candidate among all three frameworks for understanding the research subject.

Like Taylor, Riceour puts morality in the centre of his framework. He makes it crystal clear that without ethics, there would not be a self. Therefore, he suggests a good life for an individual is to "live well with and for others in just institutions". He also agrees with Taylor that the other is constitutive of the self.

Riceour's framework on the notion of self can be seen to supplement Taylor's framework. Ricoeur not only takes Taylor's narrative view of the self further by explaining how narratives help individuals make sense of their selves, but also by giving further discussion on how the other affects individuals in constituting their selves. Being the patient of the action taken by the agent, the other becomes an influential part in affecting the self's evaluation and estimation of its ethical actions. This concept could be crucial for understanding the Chinese self, as the relation with the other seems to be important in the Chinese context.

Ricoeur's framework is helpful in understanding the role of ethics and others in the constitution of self. However, it still does not have sufficient discussion on relations with others. In his work, Ricoeur distinguishes the others into three types: the first is related to one's own body as the other; the second exists in the interpersonal relationship; and the third is found in the inter-human relationship in the wider community. Both the second and the third others can be transformed into a self of reciprocity. However, his distinction of others does not go further. For example, he does not differentiate an individual's relationship with family members from that with their friends. This might be the major shortfall of Ricoeur's framework when we use it to interpret the Chinese employees, as it seems that the framework does not recognise the impact of the sophisticated human relations on the Chinese self. Therefore, it is important to scrutinise Chinese systems of thinking in order to understand the research subject.

3.3 A Chinese perspective

Some people may misunderstand the Chinese as 'selfless', however, Hall and Ames (1998), when discussing the self in Chinese and western cultures, argue that if people limit themselves to the interpretative categories associated with the western conception of the self, such as 'rational consciousness' and 'organic functioning', then "Chinese may …

be considered quite literally as selfless" (p. 24). Not only are some western interpretations not analogous in the Chinese context for the understanding of the self, but some Chinese terms are also understood differently. For example, Hall and Ames contend that in the West, 'individual' can refer to "a single, unitary, separate, and indivisible thing that, by virtue of some essential property or properties, qualifies as a member of a class" (p. 25). Using this definition to understand the Chinese self, then it would seem appropriate to conclude that the Chinese self does not entail a strong sense of 'individuality'. However, Hall and Ames point out that 'individual' can mean a unique person who "has the character of a single and unsubstitutable particular" (p. 25). In a Confucian framework, this 'unique individuality' is achieved through the individual's multivalent relationships with others. By taking his or her roles in these relationships, the individual "becomes recognized, distinguished, or renowned by virtue of communal deference" (p. 25) to the quality of his or her character.

Following the above discussion, it would probably be appropriate to predict that there are many terms, notions or concepts related to the self that are interpreted and understood differently in the western and the Chinese contexts. Charles Taylor's work, *Sources of Self* (1989), and Paul Ricoeur's work, *Oneself as Another* (1992), were discussed in the previous section due to their emphasis on 'the moral aspect' and 'the relation with others'—the two important aspects related to the self in the Chinese context. However, the two aspects are understood in the western context. Thus, it is arguable that they may be interpreted differently in the Chinese context. Therefore, this section discusses the notion of self from a Chinese perspective.

To understand the Chinese conception of the self, it is important to learn the essential ideas that contribute to Chinese culture. Most of these ideas are from two distinct traditions that originated in ancient China: one is the Confucian philosophical tradition, and the other one is the Taoist philosophical tradition. Some key concepts of these two philosophical traditions are discussed in the following. It is however important to point out that the discussion is limited to the early Confucian and Taoist frameworks.

3.3.1 A Confucian framework

Although China has over four thousand years of history (see Table 3.1, p. 80) and its culture is far from being homogeneous, it is undeniable that Confucian values have played a prominent role in moulding Chinese character and behaviour (Chan, 2008; Cheung et al., 2006; Chung et al., 2008).

Confucius, the propagator of the Confucian framework, was born in the Spring and Autumn Period[4] (722 BC–476 BC), during which ancient China was ruled by a feudal system. As the era unfolded, the social order started to collapse; smaller states were taken over by larger ones. The feudal system fell apart, as did the regulations and practices that went with the system. Confucius attributed the chaos to the violation of the code for social relations with others; therefore, he advocated correctness of social relationships, as well as personal morality, to solve the problems of his time.

In the Confucian framework, the self is generally not conceived as an isolated, separate entity. Rather, by Confucian definition, man is a social, or interactive, being (Moore, 1968). Tu Wei-ming (1985a), a New Confucian thinker, believes that there is a major difference between the self from the Confucian perspective (or the Confucian self) and the self from a western perspective (or the western self). He argues that the western self finds its place on its own; outside and independent of social relationships. The Confucian self, however, "is far from being an isolated and enclosed individual" (p. 26). Tu envisions the Confucian self as inseparable from its social position at the centre of relationships. In the Confucian framework, although the self is located in a person, it is

4 The Spring and Autumn Period covers the period from sometime the second half of the 8th century BC to the first half of the 5th century BC. It roughly corresponds to the first half of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty.

only by being the centre of a social network that the self comes to life. In other words, Tu sees the Confucian self as an 'interdependent self', whereas the western self is an 'independent self'. However, based on the discussion in the first part of this chapter, it seems that it is not particularly appropriate for Tu to describe the western self as "isolated and enclosed" and "independent of social relationships". This description might be fair if only Giddens' framework (1991) is examined, but it would be inappropriate if Taylor's (1989) and Ricoeur's (1992) works are considered. As discussed, both Taylor and Ricoeur emphasise the importance of 'others' in individuals' construction of themselves. As such, it is important to point out that 'the relationship with others' may be more sophisticated in the Confucian framework and it may be truly vital in understanding the self in the Chinese context. To explore this topic more, it is essential to understand the key concepts of the Confucian framework.

3.3.1.1 *Dao*: the human way

Zhang (2002) points out that *dao* refers to the human way and the way of Heaven, but Confucius mainly spoke of the human way and seldom talked about the way of Heaven. The Confucian *dao* is sometimes used as a noun in *Lunyu*[5], and sometimes as a verb. When it is used as a noun, it means 'the way' referring to the ethical ideal of a good human life as a whole (Cua, 1998). Cua (1998) suggests that this ideal life is amenable to varying interpretations of its concrete significance in different times and places; however, its essence lies in the harmony of the diverse elements of moral experience. The harmony is achieved in two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. Berthrong and Berthrong (2000) argue that the vertical dimension refers to individuals' desire to cultivate themselves so that they are in harmony with *dao*, whereas the horizontal dimension is "the need to cultivate harmonious and respectful relations with other people" (p. 29).

5 *Lunyu* (The Analects) is mainly a collection of sayings and conversations of Confucius and was selected by Zhuxi (1130 – 1200), a Confucian scholar in Song Dynasty, as one of the Four Books as a foundational introduction to the Confucian philosophical tradition.

When *dao* is used as a verb, it means 'to guide' or 'to serve as a guide in this ethical ideal of life'. *Yijing*[6] is the first book among the Chinese Classics that discusses in what way (*dao*) the world hangs together. The focus of the book is not to explain all the possible situations in the world so that individuals know how to act precisely in each situation, but rather to provide resources for individuals to think how they could interact with others (including humans and nature) in the world. It is important to emphasise that on one hand *dao* needs to be discovered; on the other hand, it also needs to be 'built':

> "It is Man who is capable of broadening the Way (*dao*). It is not the Way that is capable of broadening Man." (*Lunyu*, 15:29; in Lau, 1992, p. 157)

It is clear that *dao* is not 'fixed' or 'static'. When times and situations are different, *dao* may change too. Therefore, individuals cannot expect simply to discover *dao*; they must act as a 'road builder' of *dao* and treat it as always under construction. If individuals understand *dao* and act in accordance with it, they will become a sage or an ideal moral person and be able to coexist harmoniously with the *tiandi* (Heaven and Earth)—nature and other creatures.

In Confucius's view, everyone can be a sage and each person has the potential to fully understand *dao* because everyone has intrinsic goodness, which is endowed by Heaven (*tian*). Confucius contended that *tian* (Heaven) created everything, including humans, and everyone was born with equal 'heavenly nature', intrinsic goodness. Mencius believed if individuals fully realise their *xin* (heart-mind) through self-cultivation, they will be able to comprehend their nature and eventually understand *dao* (the way). Some may argue that if goodness is intrinsic, *dao* will be understood automatically; why, then, is self-cultivation needed? Tu (1985b) argues that self-cultivation brings "into existence the ontological assertion that human nature is good" (p. 246). Therefore, individuals can choose to develop their *xin* fully and become a sage, but they can also choose not to

6 *Yijing* (The Book of Changes) describes an ancient system of cosmology and philosophy which is at the heart of Chinese cultural beliefs. The philosophy centres on the ideas of the dynamic balance of opposites, the evolution of events as a process, and acceptance of the inevitability of change.

develop their *xin* and become *xiaoren* (a mean-spirited person) who does not follow *dao* but seeks only immediate personal gains.

3.3.1.2 *De*: ethical virtue

How can a person realise *dao*? It is given that a person realises *dao* by acquiring *de* (virtues). Confucius once said,

> "I set my heart on the Way (*dao*), base myself on virtue, lean upon benevolence (*ren*) *for* support..." (*Lunyu*, 7:6; in Lau, 1992, p. 57)

For Confucius, virtue is "the real and visible manifestation of the Way (*dao*)" (Zhang, 2002, p. 13) with *ren as* the chief virtue. This explains why Confucian teaching lays a strong emphasis on *de*. Confucians regards *de* as an ethical achievement through an individual's lifelong self-cultivation. In *Daxue*[7], the opening remark clearly states that the way to great learning lies in *ming ming de* (the clear exemplification of the ethical virtue).

Individuals attaining virtues are *junzi*. *Junzi* originally referred to a man of a particular social status in a government, a noble man, but later it mainly referred to a man with high moral standards (de Bary, 1991b). Although *junzi* is commonly translated as 'gentleman', the word 'gentleman' perhaps does not completely capture the core quality of *junzi*. When a person is described as a gentleman, the focus is on his manner and behaviour; it does not reflect his moral standards. Therefore, *junzi* is translated as 'a virtuous person' here to emphasise high moral standards that *junzi* is expected to attain. As a moral agent, *junzi* possesses the power of attraction to or influence on others. Any righteous man willing to improve themselves and that acts virtuously can become *junzi*.

7 *Daxue* (The Great Learning) is the first of the Four books of the Confucian philosophical tradition selected by Zhuxi. It was originally one chapter in *Liji* (The Classic of Rites). The book consists of a short main text, attributed to Confucius and nine commentary chapters by Zengzi (505–436 BC), one of Confucius's disciples.

Cheung et al. (2006) suggest that there are five key characteristics of *junzi*. First is the intrinsic motivation for moral attainment. *Junzi* seeks self-cultivation because of internal aspiration, not external aspiration like recognition from others. Second is the belief in moral perfectibility for all humans. *Junzi* has a desire to constantly pursue self-cultivation. Third is a reflexive consciousness. Confucians incessantly have inward examination to see if they themselves act virtuously. Fourth is the stress on moral consideration over personal gains. For Confucius, "A virtuous person (*junzi*) is concerned with what is right (*yi*), whereas a mean-spirited person (*xiaoren*) is concerned with what is profitable (*li*)." (*Lunyu*, 4:16; in Zheng, 2007b, p. 60) Last is a consciousness of social responsibility. *Junzi* believes that there is a call for them to go beyond personal refinement to serve a wider community. Zengzi, a disciple of Confucius, once said:

> "A gentleman (*junzi*) must be strong and resolute, for his burden is heavy and the road is long. He takes benevolence (*ren*) as his burden. ...Only with death does the road come to an end." (*Lunyu*, 8:7; in Lau, 1992, p. 71)

The manifesting of *de* is not only personal business; it also affects society at large. Confucius opined that the key to successful leadership lies in the manifesting of *de* and advocated that the government follow the practice of *junzi* when they govern the people:

> "Govern the people by regulations, keep order among them by chastisements, and they will flee from you, and lose all self-respect. Govern them by moral force, keep order among them by rituals (*li*) and they will keep their self-respect and come to you of their own accord." (*Lunyu*, 2:3; in Waley, 1938 (2005), p. 88)

For Confucians, it is better to "*yi de fu ren*" (convince people by ethical virtue) instead of "*yi li fu ren*" (impose on people by force).

3.3.1.3 Five Constant Virtues

De is a collective noun for ethical virtue. To be a person with *de* means that the individual is able to manifest virtues like *ren* (authoritative conduct), *yi* (appropriateness), *li* (ritual propriety), *zhi* (wisdom), and *xin* (trustworthiness). These virtues are known as Five Constant Virtues and they are closely related, especially the first three.

3.3.1.3.1 *Ren* (authoritative conduct)

Judging from *Lunyu*, as Confucius discussed *ren* the most, *ren* is regarded as the most essential in the teachings of Confucius. Other virtues are built on the basis of *ren*. *Ren* is commonly translated as 'benevolence'. However, Ames (2009) is not completely satisfied with the translation. He rightly points out to manifest *ren* requires a long self-cultivation process which is strenuous. In other words, to be a person with *ren* is an achievement. Although the terms show some of the distinguishing quality of *ren*, simply translate *ren* as 'benevolence' or 'humanity' might undermine the effort the individuals need to play to be a person of *ren*. Therefore, Ames suggests translating *ren* as 'authoritative conduct'.

The Chinese character *ren* (仁) means two (二) persons (人), thus it clearly shows that *ren* is related to the relationship between two persons. Hu Shih (1919, cited in King & Bond, 1985), a leading Chinese philosopher in the 20th century, stated that in the Confucian teaching, "man cannot exist alone; all actions must be in a form of interaction between man and man" (p. 31). The central ethical interest of *ren* is the love and care that individuals show others and their affectionate concern for the well-being of others (Cua, 1998). Therefore, to be a person of *ren* (authoritative conduct), individuals need to put their selves aside and put a priority on the concern of others.

For Confucius, *ren* is the recognition that personal character is the consequence of cultivating one's relationships with others. Therefore, *ren* sometimes is translated as 'humanity'. For Confucius, there is nothing more that defines humanity than the practical consideration of one human being showing concern for another:

> "... the term 'human kindness' (*ren*) is derived from the word 'human', and its greatest expression is in the treatment of one's kin with the proper degree of affection." (*Zhongyong*[8], 20; in Plaks, 2003, p. 37)

8 *Zhongyong* (The Doctrine of the Mean) like *Daxue*, is also one of the Four books of the Confucian philosophical tradition. The book was written by Zisi (492–431 BC), the grandson of Confucius.

On six separate occasions in *Lunyu*, Confucius was asked by his disciples of what he meant by *ren*, and six times he gave different answers. He told Zhonggong that *ren* means "Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire" (*Lunyu*, 12:2; in Lau, 1992, p. 109). When Simaniu asked him the same question, he said, "The mark of the benevolent (*ren*) man is that he is loath to speak" (*Lunyu*, 12:3; in Lau, 1992, p. 109) for fear that he may be unable to live up to his words. To Yanyuan, he answered, "To return to the observance (*ren*) of the rites (*li*) through overcoming the self constitutes benevolence (*ren*)" (*Lunyu*, 12:1; in Lau, 1992, p. 109). The reply he gave to Fanchi was: "While at home, hold yourself in a respectful attitude; when serving in an official capacity, be reverent; when dealing with others, give your best" (*Lunyu*, 13:19; in Lau, 1992, p. 127). To Zilu, he replied, "There are five things and whoever is capable of putting them into practice in the Empire is certainly 'benevolent' (*ren*)… They are respectfulness, tolerance, trustworthiness in word, quickness, and generosity" (*Lunyu*, 17:6; in Lau, 1992, p. 173). He told Zigong, "a benevolent (*ren*) man helps others to take their stand in that he himself wishes to take his stand, and gets others there in that he himself wishes to get there" (*Lunyu*, 6:55; in Lau, 1992, p. 55). The answers may be different, but the essence of all the six answers is related to the kind treatment of others.

Herr (2003) suggests that Confucius talked about two kinds of treatment when discussing *ren*: one is positive, which is to establish others and seeks to enlarge others; the other one is negative which is to forbid one to "impose on others what you yourself do not desire". To do good to others is called *zhong* (sincerity), though it sometimes is translated as loyalty, in *Lunyu*, 4:15. Not to bring harm on others is called *shu* (empathy, reciprocity) in *Lunyu*, 15:24. Yao (1995) argues that *zhong* emphasises more on individuals' sincerity while *shu* emphasises more on reflecting on others. Despite their differences, both *zhong* and *shu* are important for manifesting *ren*. To be *ren* requires individuals to be sincere and sympathetic in their relationship with others.

In Confucian teaching, the family is the natural home and the foundation for extending *ren*, as "the family is the fundamental well-spring of love and affection" (Herr, 2003, p. 473). For Mencius, the parent-child relation is the root of *ren*, "The content of benevolence (*ren*) is the serving of one's parents..." (*Mengzi*[9], 4A:27; in Lau, 2003, p. 169). As "the fulfilment of one's duty towards one's parents is the most basic" (*Mengzi*, 4A:19; in Lau, 2003, p. 165), thus only when individuals fulfil this duty, can they extend *ren* to other relationships. Therefore, the parent-child relations can be seen as a prototype for other *lun* (relations).

3.3.1.3.2 *Yi* (appropriateness)

When Confucians discuss *ren*, they often discuss *yi* (appropriateness) at the same time. For example, Mencius advocated *ju ren you yi* (abiding by authoritative conduct and following appropriateness) (*Mengzi*, 4A:10; in Ren & Liu, 2004, p. 158), claiming that *ren* is the basis for individuals to decide what is 'right' and what is 'wrong': "Benevolence (*ren*) is the heart of man, and rightness (*yi*) is his road." (*Mengzi*, 6A:27; in Lau 2003, p. 255); also, "Benevolence is man's peaceful abode and rightness his proper path" (*Mengzi*, 4A:10; in Lau, 2003, p. 159).

Although some English-Chinese dictionaries (e.g. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*) translate 'righteous' as *yi*, as Mote (1971) points out, *yi* in Chinese does not emphasises 'righteousness'. The focus of *yi* is on what is the right thing for one to do. Confucius said,

> "A gentleman (*junzi*) in his dealings with the world has neither enmities nor affections; but whatever he sees right (*yi*) he ranges himself beside it" (*Lunyu*, 4:10; in Waley, 1938 (2005), p.104).

What is the right thing to do depends on its appropriateness. It is discussed in *Zhongyong*, 20, that *yi* is derived from the root meaning 'appropriate' and its greatest manifestation

9 *Mengzi (Mencius)* is a collection of anecdotes and conversations of Mencius (372–289 BC), the Confucian thinker and philosopher. *Mencius* is also one of the Four Books.

being in the honouring of the person of virtue. Furthermore, "to value wise and virtuous persons, he should take their rank into consideration" (*Zhongyong*, 20; in He, 1996, p. 62). Therefore, *yi* is a judgment appropriate to the situation at hand and individuals' social status or roles. Hall and Ames (1987) discuss two types of appropriateness when examining *yi*. The first one is "appropriateness to one's own person" and the second one is "appropriateness to one's context". Therefore, *yi* involves considering one's situation and the context. Liu (2004) also points out that the actions of *yi* are actions that are "appropriate to their social roles or their relations with others" (p. 365). These social status and roles are clearly defined in the Confucian concept of *lun* (relations).

According to Huang (2002), the Confucian ethic is a 'status ethic'. Status is manifested in *wulun* (five cardinal relations). According to the Confucian teaching, there are many kinds of relations between individuals and the most fundamental are *wulun*. This key Confucian concept proposed by Mencius includes relations between (1) a ruler and a subject (superior and subordinate), (2) father and son (parent and child), (3) husband and wife, (4) elder brother and younger brother (siblings), and (5) friends. Three of them belong to the family and the other two are based on the family model (King & Bond, 1985). In relation to this, it is no accident that the word 'country' in Chinese means 'country family' (*guo jia*). The rulers in ancient China regarded the kingdom as their family property (*jia tian xia*) and their subjects as their sons (*zi min*). Just like in friendship, individuals address each other as elder brother (*ge* or *xiong*) or younger brother (*di*). In this social network, individuals enjoy the rights and obligations associated with their status and roles: the superior, parent, husband, elder brother/sister, and older friend seem to have more privileges and authority over the subordinate, child, wife, younger brother, and younger friend, but they also have more responsibilities. When an individual is acting according to *yi*, he or she will consider these roles.

Confucius often put *yi* (appropriateness) and *li*[10] (profit) together for comparison. He saw that *junzi* (a virtuous person) pursues *yi* and moves away from ego advantages, *li* (profit), while *xiaoren* (a mean-spirited person) seeks personal gains. Hall and Ames (1987) suggest that to realise *yi* in one's action calls for attaining it in oneself; to attain *yi*, one needs to *keji* (discipline oneself). When one disciplines oneself, one will not spend time to pursue one's own benefits seeking ego advantages.

3.3.1.3.3 *Li* (ritual propriety)

For Confucius, a *junzi* (a virtuous person) will take *yi* as his essence and act compliantly with *li*. *Li* originally meant 'to sacrifice' to the ancestors or spirits, but later focuses on the ritual codes which help individuals know how to act appropriately in their relationships with others. Therefore, *li* is a set of prescriptions for proper behaviour: in mourning, sacrifices, marriage, ceremony, and daily activities. However, for Confucians, *li* is more than dogmatic and meaningless ritual; it is the external expression of the internal morality. Therefore, without the internal morality, *li* becomes meaningless. Confucius emphasised that *ren* (authoritative conduct) should come before *li*. The rhetorical question he asked in *Lunyu* clearly shows his view "What can a man do with the rites (*li*) who is not benevolent (*ren*)?" (*Lunyu*, 3:3; in Lau, 1992, p. 19). Therefore, *ren* is inner morality, whereas *li* is the external rules conforming human behaviour to manifest *ren*. Bockover (1997) is right to suggest that the concepts of *li* and *ren* are essentially related and they are inseparable.

It is perhaps not difficult to understand why *li* is so strongly emphasised by Confucians. According to *Ci Hai* (Encyclopaedia) (p. 240, 1999), *li* was said to be made by Zhou Gong (11th Century BC), a politician of Xi Zhou which was an ancient Chinese Kingdom, to help the king rule over the country. In Chun Qiu (722–481 BC), the kings of Xi Zhou

10 *Li* (profit) and *li* (ritual propriety) are two different Chinese words. The Chinese character for *li* (profit) is 利 and *li* (ritual propriety) is 禮.

became powerless to govern the country, and the country was in a chaotic situation. Confucius was born in this period and he was very concerned about the corrupt state of his time. He looked to *li* to restore the order of the country, and he and his disciples worked hard to develop the philosophical basis of *li*.

Liu (2004) points out that *li* defines the appropriate social behaviour and conduct of various roles in the human relations. In other words, *li* is a kind of pattern for social relationship. In these relations, individuals are trained that "*qing shu you bie*" (there should be a proper order by age) and "*zhang you you xu*" (there is a distinction between close and distant relationships). For Confucians, *li* is essential, as it helps individuals know their places in society and sets boundaries of legitimate actions and prohibits certain actions. For example, if the child acts according to *li*, he or she will demonstrate the virtue of *xiao* (filial piety—love and respect for the parents and ancestors) in the relationship with his or her parent, whereas if the parent acts according to *li*, he or she will show care and concern to his or her child. Similarly, if the subordinate acts according to *li*, he or she will show respect and be loyal to the superior; if the superior acts according to *li*, he or she will treat the subordinate fairly and take care of the welfare of the subordinate. Therefore, the guidelines for instantiating these roles: what they should do to fulfil their obligation and duties are defined by *li*. When they act accordingly, it "constitute(s) the ground from which the entire system of ritual propriety (*li*) springs" (*Zhongyong*, 20; in Plaks, 2003, p. 37). Individuals are expected to know these differences and fulfil the obligations of the roles he or she plays in the social network. In the process of performing these roles appropriately, "the Confucian self acquires a unique identity" (Herr, 2003, p. 471).

Li seems to be dogmatic and only serves as an instrument for cultivating *ren* (Chan, 2006). In fact, it is more than moral rules to be followed. If *li* is examined closely, it is not difficult to find that Confucians do not just emphasise the boundary of proper behaviour;

they also stress the importance of the development of ethical character. An important aspect of *li* is *jing* (respect). For Confucius, without *jing*, *li* is meaningless:

> "Nowadays, people think that to be filial, they only need to provide their parents with food. But even dogs and horses are provided with food. If there is no feeling of respect (*jing*), where is the difference?" (*Lunyu*, 2:7; in Zheng, 2007b, p. 26)

Therefore, only when individuals respect the worth of others, can they really act according to *li*: "A person who has *li* (ritual propriety) show respect (*jing*) to others." (*Mengzi*, 4B:28; in Ren & Liu, 2004, p. 190) Confucians respect people at a higher rank but also respect others at a lower rank:

> "For an inferior to show deference to a superior is known as 'honouring the honoured'; for a superior to show deference to an inferior is known as 'honouring the good and wise'. These two derive, in fact, from the same principle." (*Mengzi*, 5B:3; in Lau, 2003, p. 225)

Confucians believe everyone, even petty men, deserve to be respected, because everyone is endowed by *tian* (Heaven) with goodness and, therefore, has the potential to be a sage.

Cua (1998) suggests that *li* has a threefold function: delimiting, supporting, and ennobling. In the delimiting function, *li* is fundamentally directed to the prevention of conflicts, thus promoting the unity and harmony of the community. Bringing harmony to the community is the most important function of *li*: "Of the things brought about by rites (*li*), harmony is the most valuable" (*Lunyu*, 1:12; in Lau, 1992, p. 7). For Confucius, harmony calls for conciliation but not accommodation. In the supportive function, *li* provides conditions for satisfying individuals' desires within the prescribed limit of action through acceptable channels. If an individual does not act through acceptable channels, disorder will ensue resulting in the individual losing his or her face. In the ennobling function, *li* aims to cultivate and educate individuals in accordance with the spirit of *ren* and *yi*, and *li* refers to the forms of conduct permeated with the right spirit of *ren* and *yi*. It is clear that *ren*, *yi*, *li* are closely related.

3.3.1.3.4 *Zhi* (wisdom)

Ren, *yi* and *li* are mostly discussed virtues, but there are two other important constant virtues: *zhi* and *xin* (trustworthiness). Confucians value *zhi*. Mote (1971) suggests that apart from *ren*, the most important virtue in the Confucian philosophical tradition is *zhi*. It is true that Confucius sometimes treated *ren* and *zhi*, together with *yong* (courage), as on a par (Zhang, 2002):

> "The man of wisdom (*zhi*) is never in two minds; the man of benevolence (*ren*) never worries; the man of courage (*yong*) is never afraid." (*Lunyu*, 9:29; in Lau, 1992, p. 85)

> "There are three things in the way of becoming a virtuous person (*junzi*). ... A man of authoritative conduct does not worry; a man of wisdom (*zhi*) does not go astray; a man of courage does not fear." (*Lunyu*, 14:28, in Zheng, 2007b, p. 220)

In earlier texts, the Chinese character of *zhi* (wisdom, 智) was often used interchangeably with the Chinese character of *zhi* (know, 知). Mencius regarded a *xin* (heart-mind) that knows right and wrong as *zhi* (wisdom) (Munro, 2009). However, Mote (1971) suggests that the Confucian concept of *zhi* is not just knowing or knowledge, it refers to an integrated mind, which not only involves the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong, but also calls for taking right actions and avoiding doing wrongs.

Zhi (wisdom) therefore involves an individual's knowledge to practise *li*, *ren,* and *yi* in human relationships. When individuals are able to perform *li* correctly, cultivate their *ren* and *yi*, individuals can then attain *zhi*. Therefore, the Confucian concept of *zhi* is like a functional application of an informed intellect of the three virtues.

For Confucians, wisdom is to know or to understand, not so much about the natural world, but lived human relationships showing values such as *cheng* (sincerity), *yong* (courage), and *xiao* (filial piety—love and respect for the parents and ancestors). In *Lunyu*, wisdom is described to be manifested in the ability to interact effectively with others. Confucius regarded that wisdom consists of understanding the situation and other people. When individuals attain *zhi*, they would then be able to harmonise themselves with *dao* and have a harmonious relationship with others. If individuals do not know how to socialise with people in an appropriate way, they could not be considered wise.

3.3.1.3.5 *Xin* (trustworthiness)

Xin (trustworthiness) was added by Dong Zhongshu[11] (195–115 BC) in the Han Dynasty (206BC–220) to *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi* to comprise the Five Constant Virtues. *Xin* is used to describe individuals who can be trusted to fulfil their proper ethical obligations. Used as a verb, *xin* means 'to believe' or 'to trust'. The earliest and basic sense of *xin* is not only being honest and sincere, but also being true to one's word—doing one's best for others, and this in fact is indicated in the Chinese character *xin* (信) which is made up of persons (人) and words (言). A trustworthy person is one who can be relied on in all matters.

Some see that *xin* is a virtue that governs the relationship between friends. Mencius once said "*Penyou you xin*" (There is trust among friends.) (*Mengzi*, 3A:4; in Ren & Liu, 2004, p. 115). Being trustworthy to one's friends is considered as proper behaviour according to *li*. In fact, *xin* is not restricted to friends only; it is also regarded as a proper fulfilment of one's duties to others.

For Confucius, *xin* was a very important virtue which is related to doing one's best for others. Without such quality, a person will lose his or her value:

> "If a person lacks trustworthiness (*xin*), I don't know how he can be acceptable. When a pin is missing from the yoke-bar of a large cart, or from the collar-bar of a small cart, how can it go?" (*Lunyu*, 2:22; in Zheng, 2007b, p. 34)
>
> "Being trustworthy (*xin*) in speech … though in a strong and petty-minded manner, this can be qualified to come next." (*Lunyu*, 13:20; in Zheng, 2007b, pp. 199–200)

11 Dong Zhongshu (195–115 BC) was a Han Dynasty scholar. Traditionally, he was regarded as the advocator of promoting the Confucian framework as official ideology of the Chinese imperial state.

He made it clear that it is not acceptable for a person to be untrustworthy. He believed that being trustworthy is more important than keeping one's life:

> "Give up food. Death has always been with us since the beginning of time, but when there is no trust (*xin*), the common people will not be able to stand on their feet." (*Lunyu*, 12:7; in Lau, 1992, p. 111)

Koehn (2001) suggests when individuals display a good will to look beyond their self-interest but seek welfare of others, these individuals should be trusted. Therefore, a trustworthy person will also be a person of *ren* who tries to seek to enlarge others and avoid conflict. In fact, being a trustworthy person, one will engender more trust and encourage others to be trustworthy as well:

> "When those above are devoted to trustworthiness (*xin*), the people will not dare to be untruthful." (*Lunyu*, 13:4; in Zheng, 2007b, p. 190)

3.3.2 A Taoist framework

The Taoist system of thinking is the second influential indigenous tradition in the history of Chinese civilization and thought. Traditionally, Laozi is regarded as the founder of the Taoist thinking and the author of *Daodejing*, one of the representative texts of the Taoist thinking, though contemporary scholars no longer view that *Daodejing* was written by one author—Laozi (Lai, 2006). Historians contend that Laozi lived in the 4th century BC, concurrent with the Warring States Period [12] (475 BC–221 BC), though it was traditionally regarded that Laozi had lived in the 6th century BC. No matter whether Laozi lived in the Spring and Autumn Period or the Warring States Period, China at his time was in a chaotic state. Like Confucius, Laozi attempted to restore order in society. However, instead of emphasising social virtues like *ren* (authoritative conduct), *yi* (appropriateness) and *li* (ritual propriety), Laozi advised the virtue of spontaneity or naturalness (*ziran*), which is realised by the attitude of *wuwei* (non-assertive action).

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12 The Warring States Period covers the period from sometime in the 5th century BC to the unification of China by the Qing dynasty in 221 BC. It is the second part of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, following the Spring and Autumn Period.

The Taoist framework suggests neither complete detachment nor transcendence from the world. It in fact advocates a reverential attitude towards the natural world and encourages individuals to live in harmony with the fundamental patterns of nature. This implies a version of the self that is "beyond the notion of an ego in opposition to the world' (Morris, 1994, p. 110). Zhuangzi[13] (369–286 BC) often spoke of the 'forgetting of myself' or 'loss of myself'.

While both Confucian thinking and Taoist thinking see that the self is interdependent, unlike the Confucian self, which is situated in the web of human relationships, the Taoist self is part of the greater whole, nature that consists of *wanwu* (ten thousand things in nature), not just humans. The Taoist self recognises that it does not have the control of other things or people; therefore, it attempts to harmonise with them rather than go against them. The Taoist framework advocates a unity between humans and nature by encouraging individuals to embody themselves in nature.

3.3.2.1 *Dao*: the way of Heaven

Although the Confucian philosophical tradition and the Taoist philosophical tradition represent contrasting orientations towards life, they do share some common concepts. One of these concepts is *dao* (the way). Unlike Confucius, Laozi was concerned more with the way of Heaven. He perceived *dao* as closely related to *tian* (Heaven), but *dao* is more fundamental than Heaven as *dao* is the beginning of all things and Heaven comes from *dao* (Zhang, 2002). Taoists do not see *dao* as a God-like creator of nature; the world had created itself through *dao*.

> "Reversal is the motion of the Way (*dao*); weakness in the use of the Way. The myriad things under heaven are generated from being (*you*). Being is generated from beingless (*wu*)." (*Daodejing*, 40; in Chen & Zhang, 2001, p. 114)

13 Zhuangzi (369–286 BC) was a famous philosopher in ancient China, and a key follower of Laozi (4th Century BC), the founder of Taoism.

Here "being" (*you*) refers to Heaven and Earth whereas "beingless" (*wu*) refers to *dao* (the way) (Zhang, 2002). For Taoists, the concept of *dao* is beyond words and it has to be experienced. As *dao* is nameless and formless, *dao* is said to be beingless.

Dao is the way of nature that keeps it balanced and in order. It puts everything in its place without prejudice and guides the functions of everything in nature:

> "The great *dao* is broad and it flows left as well as right. It nourishes all life and all manifestation without holding anything back" (*Daodejing*, 34, in Chen & Zhang, 2001, p.99).

Therefore, under the creation of *dao*, everything is endowed by *dao* and is equal in status. Taoists believe if everything is allowed to go on its own way according to the natural order, harmony of nature will be established.

Dao is also the way of human life. As discussed in Section 3.3.1.1, for Confucians, if individuals understand *dao* and act according to it, they will become a sage, the ideal moral person. Confucians believe one needs to be self-cultivated and self-disciplined to become a sage. However, Taoists disagree with Confucians that individuals should make deliberate effort to follow *dao*. As for Taoists, there is a paradox here, if individuals deliberately learn what *dao* is, it is not the *dao* they should follow: "The way that can be spoken of is not the constant way" (*Daodejing*, 1; in Lau, 2001, p. 3)

Therefore, Taoists believe if individuals let go of their ego and follow the natural rhythms and patterns of nature, they will attain *dao*. When individuals are able to conform their existence to the way of *dao*, they will become a *zhenren* (a real or true person), the ideal enlightened person (Morris, 1994).

3.3.2.2 *Yin* and *yang*: two opposite forces

Dao produced the original and undifferentiated, vital *qi* (energy), "One", which is the source of two opposite cosmic forces, *yin* and *yang*, which complement each other in creating things:

> "The way begets one; one begets two; two begets three; three begets the myriad creatures. The myriad creatures carry on their backs the *yin* and embrace in their arms the *yang* and are the blending of the generative forces of the two." (*Daodejing*, 42; in Lau, 2001, p. 63)

Literally *yin* means 'the shady side' and *yang* 'the sunny side'. *Yin* normally is associated with 'weak', 'dark' and 'female' and *yang* 'strong', 'light' and 'male'. *Yin* and *yang* form a correlative pair that expresses the mutuality and interdependent relationship. Therefore, they are opposite but not mutually exclusive elements in life within the greater whole. Taoists believe these two transform and create each other: without darkness, there is no light; without light, there is no darkness. Everything has both *yin* and *yang* aspects, which constantly interact and change. When one is full and complete, the other begins to grow.

For Taoists, *yin* and *yang* form creative efficacy of the dynamic relationships. As *yin* and *yang* are not static, they are not regarded as universal principles that define phenomena. For example, a grandfather is wiser than his grandson, as he has more experience than his grandson, and hence the grandfather is *yang* and the grandson is *yin* and the grandfather 'overshadows' his grandson. However, the grandson is stronger as he is younger than his grandfather. Then in this respect, the grandson is *yang* and the grandfather is *yin*, and he 'overshadows' his grandfather. The idea of change leads to a harmonious balance. Knowing that *yin* and *yang* are not static heuristically helps Taoists see the world in a variety of ways allowing them to better understand and manage the situations they are in. They are perhaps more tolerant of others who seem to be weak or inferior in many areas, thinking that these people may be strong in other areas. 'Seeing' the strengths in others makes it easier to maintain a harmonious relationship.

3.3.2.3 *De*: an inherent power

Laozi referred *de* (virtue) as the internal support for the existence of the myriad things (Zhang, 2002). *De* is also the 'latent power' that individuals 'have obtained' from *dao*, as human beings are part of the creation of *dao*. *De* empowers individuals to conform to the way in which *dao* operates. To manifest *de*, one has to drop all sense of ego and to exercise the power without the use of force or inappropriate interference in the natural orders of things. Therefore, the Taoist *de* is different from the Confucian *de*, which is a moral achievement that is attained through repeated effort.

Laozi discussed *sanbao* (three treasures) to help manifest *de*:

> "I have three treasures which I hold and cherish. The first is known as compassion (*ci*), the second is known as frugality (*jian*), the third is known as not daring to take the lead in the empire; being compassionate one could afford to be courageous, being frugal one could afford to extend one's territory, not daring to take the lead in the empire one could afford to be lord over the vessels." (*Daodejing*, 67; in Lau, 2001, p. 99)

The three treasures help individuals in cultivating a way of living that is harmonious with *dao*. The first treasure is *ci* (compassion). Taoists think that *ci* is different from the Confucian *ren*, because *ren* in a virtue that individuals need deliberate effort to manifest and its aim is to maintain or restore the artificial feudal system and the regulations and practices associated with the system, whereas *ci* is a spontaneous kindness just like a mother's tender love to her child, which is natural (Chen, 2008). When individuals feel the connection with all life and all manifestation, they will be able to spontaneously respond to others in an appropriate and helpful manner.

The second treasure is *jian* (frugality). Taoists advocate a moral life that calls for the simplicity of desires. When individuals have fewer desires, they would be able to harmonise with others in their relationships.

The third treasure is "*bugan wei tianxia xian*" (not dare to be ahead in the world). By adopting an attitude of humility, individuals are more willing to put themselves down and ready to be guided by *dao* orienting their actions to serving others.

All the three treasures encourage individuals to move away from excessive desires and action. By doing so, their *de* will emerge naturally. The more they act spontaneously according to their inner nature and the less they rely on prescribed social virtues for their actions, th e more they can be in harmony with *dao*. Therefore, *de* implies trust in individuals' own inner nature as a source for their ethical actions.

Since the Taoist framework encourages individuals to believe in their inner nature, individuals are advised against taking deliberate effort to pursue man-made social virtues like those that Confucians advocate:

> "Exterminate the sage, discard the wise, and the people will benefit a hundredfold; exterminate benevolence, discard rectitude, and the people will again be filial." (*Daodejing*, 19; in Lau, 2001, p. 27)

Taoists believe when individuals have the virtue of spontaneity (*ziran*), other virtues like humanity, justice, and propriety will emerge without effort.

3.3.2.4 *Ziran* and *wuwei*: spontaneous action

Laozi regarded that the ways of nature (*ziran*) reflect the function of *dao*. *Ziran* is composed of two Chinese characters: the first is *zi* (自) which means 'self' and the second one is *ran* (然) which means 'what is so'; therefore literally, *ziran* means 'what is so of itself' (Zhang, 2002). The key to success in life lies in an individual's ability to allow this *ziran* (naturalness, spontaneity) to proceed when they act in different situations. When there is a violation of *ziran*, individuals pursue desires rather than following the patterns of nature; there is disorder, and the harmony in nature will be jeopardised. Laozi advocated *ziran* and opposed ritual education which he regarded as artificial and hypocritical:

> "Therefore, the sage desires not to desire and does not value goods that are hard to come by; learns to be without learning and makes good the mistakes of the multitude in order to help the myriad creatures to be natural and to refrain from daring to act." (*Daodejing*, 64; in Lau, 2001, p. 95)

The practice of *ziran* is *wuwei* (non-assertive action). What is *wuwei*? Literally, it means 'not doing'. However, Morris (1994) argues that understanding the concept as doing nothing is a misinterpretation of Taoist *wuwei* attitude towards life. In fact, *wuwei* does not mean 'no action' or 'non action'. It only discourages coercive actions that are tainted by stored knowledge or ingrained habits. *Wuwei* is an action of *ziran* (spontaneity) which serves as a consequence of deferential responses to the particular situation in which individuals are involved. *Wuwei* is an effective and efficient way of living, because it suggests individuals fit into their surroundings in such a way that allows them to respond effortlessly and spontaneously to any situation or circumstance (Fox, 1996). Fox (1996) believes that it is unfair to describe *wuwei* as 'skeptical', 'escapist', or 'purposeless'. He suggests that *wuwei* should be associated with 'effortlessness', 'responsiveness' and 'unobtrusiveness'. The story of '*pao ding jie niu*' (Butcher Ting split an ox) in *Zhuangzi*[14], another representative text of the Taoist framework, serves as a good illustration of the characteristics of 'effortlessness', 'responsiveness' and 'unobtrusiveness' of *wuwei*:

> "Butcher Ting was one day splitting an ox for Lord Wen-hui. Wherever his hand touched the ox, or his shoulder leaned against it, or his foot trod upon it, or his knee kneeled against it, there was a ripping or tearing and a zinging of the knife. It sounded just right. It achieved the same good composition found in the Mulberry Grove Dance, Yao's perfect verse of music. 'Splendid!' said his sovereign, 'How did you ever achieve such skill?'
>
> Laying aside his knife, the butcher replied, 'Through my fondness for method (*tao*) [*dao*], I have progressed in my art. When I first split oxen, I could see nothing but the whole oxen, but after three years of practice, I never saw the ox as a whole. Now I proceed by intuition and do not look with my eyes, for when a sense organ ceases to function, the inner gods take over. Relying upon the natural arrangement of its body, I strike the big cavities and pass through the large crevices. Following such sure things – the veins, arteries, and tendons are never touched at all – the big bones go untouched that's much the more! Your best butcher will change his knife

14 *Zhuangzi* was the teachings of Zhuangzi (see note 13, p. 49).

> once a year for the cutting it has been doing, and your common butcher will change his every month, because he has been breaking bones with it. But I have used this knife for nineteen years, during which I have cut up thousands of oxen, and the edge is still as good as the day it left the grindstone. You must realize that there is a crevice in every joint, but the edge of my knife has no thickness at all. When such an edge enters a crevice, the latter is wide, wide open to it as it moves, so there is room to spare. That is why after nineteen years the edge of my knife is still as good as the day it left the grindstone. ...'" (*Zhuangzi*, 3; in Joint Publishing, 2002, pp. 30–31)

Wuwei encourages individuals to follow things as they are so there will be no obstacles to be confronted, just like water flowing around a rock in a stream. It requires individuals to act according to *dao*: act at the right time and in the right place. Sometimes, it may mean that individuals have to wait patiently for the right time to come. A similar view is found in the Bible:

> "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot... He has made everything beautiful in its time. ..." (*Ecclesiastes*, Chapter 3, verses 1–2, 11)

It does not discuss what one should do when things are not in their time; however, it may be understood that things are not that easy (not beautiful) to deal with if they are not in the right time (their time). It seems that patience is called upon for things to reach their time, which is in line with what the concept of *wuwei* advocates.

It is not difficult to understand why Laozi advocated *wuwei*. Laozi lived in the Warring States Period when wars very frequently broke out among the states in ancient China. The way to heal the wounds brought by this period, as Laozi believed, was "to repudiate civilization and to revert to the way of human life that had been followed in a self-contained neolithic community" (Toynbee, 1976, p. 220). For example, Laozi suggested in *Daodejing*,

> "The best ruler is that whose presence is not aware by the people. ... When his job is done and the affairs are in order, the people all say, 'it happened to us naturally.'" (*Daodejing*, 17; in Chen & Zhang, 2001, p. 51)

> "Hence the sage says, I take no action (*wuwei*, non-assertive action), and the people are transformed of themselves; I prefer stillness, and the people are rectified of themselves; I am not meddlesome and the people prosper of themselves; I am free

> from desire and the people of themselves become simple like the uncarved block." (*Daodejing*, 57; in Lau, 2001, pp. 83, 85)

Laozi believed that without law and compulsion men would still be able to settle in harmony. As such, the Taoist framework advocates "*wuwei er zhi*" (governed in the manner of *wuwei*) which means giving a high degree of freedom to individuals to lead a simple and independent life.

Wuwei requires individuals to be open-minded. Instead of insisting that the world to conform to their pre-conceived preferences, individuals should 'empty' themselves so that they can go along with the world (Fox, 1996). Without pre-conceived preferences, individuals are free to act spontaneously in the situation or circumstance following the rhythms and patterns of nature. As *wuwei* re quires individuals to act spontaneously according to the situation, it also requires individuals to recognize the 'continuity' between themselves and others. By doing so, individuals can then respond in a way that meets their objective, and at the same time take the well-being of others into consideration in the course of action. Such behaviour promotes the harmony among people, as well as the harmony between man and nature.

3.4 Summary

This chapter has discussed the notion of self first from a western perspective examining the frameworks of Giddens, Taylor, and Ricoeur.

Giddens (1991) takes a view that the formation of self is not inherited or static; rather, it is an ongoing reflexive project. Individuals must continually integrate events they encounter in the external world, reflect on them, and turn them into a coherent 'story' about their selves.

Taylor (1989) puts the moral consideration in the centre of the constitution of self. He argues that the self is constituted only within frameworks of strong evaluation. These frameworks are from individuals' positions in the moral space.

Ricoeur (1992) shows how ethics and others play a significant role in individuals' formation of self in his discussion on narrativity, ethics, and otherness. Despite their weaknesses, all these frameworks have offered insights for understanding the research subject.

This chapter has also discussed the notion from a Chinese perspective. The Confucian and the Taoist frameworks represent contrasting orientations towards life. While the former encourages individuals to make deliberate effort to understand *dao*, the latter advocates understanding *dao* spontaneously and effortlessly.

In the Confucian framework, the self is in the centre of relationships with significant others. The Confucian self is relational, as defined by performing his and her roles prescribed by *li*. However, the Confucian self is more than a configuration of role relations; he or she also seeks a lifelong, dynamic spiritual development which enables the self to realise his or her humanity, *ren*. It is the goal of the Confucian self to live harmoniously with others.

The Taoist framework suggests neither complete detachment nor transcendence from the world, but living in harmony with nature by following the laws of nature. When the Taoist self, acting in a non-assertive way (*wuwei*) forgets his or her self, then he or she will conform to *dao* spontaneously (*ziran*). It is the goal of the Taoist self to live harmoniously with nature including humans and other things.

After scrutinising the notion of self, we can now seek to understand how Chinese employees perceive and cope with the changes in the workplace. In understanding the research subject, both the western and the Chinese frameworks will be used.

Table 3.1: A history of China

Dynasty	Year	Remarks
	Pre-history	
The Three August Ones and the Five Emperors	before 2070 BC	
Xia	2070 BC–1600 BC	
	Ancient History	
Shang	1600 BC–1046 BC	
Western Zhou	1046 BC–771 BC	
Eastern Zhou Spring and Autumn Period Warring States Period	770 BC–256 BC 722 BC–476 BC 475 BC–221 BC	Confucius (551–479 BC) Zengzi (505–436 BC) Zisi (492–431 BC) Laozi (4th Century BC) Mencius (372–289 BC) Zhuangzi (369–286 BC) Xunzi (313–238 BC)
	Imperial China	
Qin	221 BC–206 BC	
Western Han	206 BC–9 AD	Dong Zhongshu (195–115 BC)
Xin	9–25	
Eastern Han	25–220	
Three Kingdoms	220–265	
Western Jin	265–317	
Eastern Jin	317–420	
Northern and Southern Dynasties	420–581	
Sui	581–618	
Tang	618–907	
Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms	907–960	
Northern Song	960–1127	
Southern Song	1127–1279	Zhuxi (1130 – 1200)
Liao	916–1125	
Jin	1115–1234	
Yuan	1271–1368	
Ming	1368–1644	
Qing	1644–1911	
	Modern China	
Republic of China	1912–1949	Tu Wei-ming (1940–present)
People's Republic of China	1949–present	

Source: Pletcher, K. (Ed.) (2010) *The History of China*. New York: Britannica Educational Publishing.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The literature review on human resource management in China in Chapter 2 showed that since the economic reforms started in 1978, the number of foreign corporations entering the Chinese market has increased steadily. Even after the recent global economic crisis started in 2007, China remained one of the few major economies that was still growing its GDP, though the growth was weak (Ding, 2010), and MNCs were still highly optimistic about the economy in China and trying their best to keep their market share (Moody, 2010). Not only do they find it increasingly tough to battle local corporations for market share, they also need to compete with these companies for human resources (Moody, 2009; Tuo, 2008). In the battle for talent, it seems that it is important for MNCs to formulate and implement suitable human resource management practices to retain their experienced staff and attract talented people to work for them. Perhaps knowing about Chinese employees would be the first step in formulating and implementing such practices.

To help establish an understanding of Chinese employees working in MNCs, in-depth interviewing was employed to gather data from the research subject—Chinese employees working in MNCs. Interviews were conducted between April 2004 and June 2006 in an attempt to answer the following key research question:

- How do Chinese employees make sense of their selves in relation to their expatriate managers and their work life in MNCs?

There are three components in the research question: the first one is the notion of self, the second one is the relation between the self—the employee—and the other—the expatriate manager, and the third one is work life.

This chapter explains the choice of methodology for this research. Section 4.2 provides a brief account of the ontological and epistemological concerns explaining the decision to conduct a qualitative study. Section 4.3 proceeds to discuss using hermeneutics as the research method in this study. Section 4.4 deals with the empirical study itself, is divided into three parts: namely, preparation for the fieldwork, the fieldwork, and activities after the fieldwork.

4.2 Quantitative or qualitative research approaches?

There has been a long-standing debate about what research approach should be used in the field of Social Sciences. This debate has mainly centred on two different research traditions: the quantitative and qualitative research approaches.

The quantitative research approaches focus on hypothesis testing by examining mechanistic correlations between pre-determined variables. These approaches are commonly considered 'objective' as they rely heavily on statistical data collected through methods such as surveys, questionnaires, and tests. The results produced are precise and easily comparable with an aim toward hypothesis testing.

On the other hand, qualitative research approaches focus on human experiences in context-specific settings and on the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of these settings. These approaches are often seen as 'subjective' as they seek a holistic view of the phenomenon studied through the respondents' own words and perceptions. Data are collected through methods like in-depth interviews, participant observations, and case studies. These approaches are concerned with the meaning of the phenomenon studied rather than hypothesis testing.

These general overviews give an indication for the researcher to explore further the major ontological and epistemological assumptions upon which the two types of approaches are based. As Morgan and Smircich (1980) argue, the choice of a research methodology "embodies a variety of assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge and the methods through which that knowledge can be obtained" (p. 491). With sufficient appreciation of these assumptions, researchers, especially novice researchers, may find it easier to make a decision on the methodology for their projects.

4.2.1 Ontological assumptions: objectivity versus subjectivity

Ontology refers to assumptions about the nature of reality. A basic ontological question is whether reality is of an objective nature which is external to individuals, or whether reality is subjective and the product of individual cognition (Long et al., 2000).

Quantitative research approaches take a view that "reality is objective and singular, apart from the researcher" (Creswell, 2003, p. 5). Reality exists out there regardless of whether it is correctly perceived by humans, or whether there are humans around to make such perceptions. This objective view of reality means that lawful cause-effect relationships exist, these can explain human behaviour, and these relationships can be observed and measured objectively. These relationships may be used to predict or control behaviour if researchers can identify the relationships between variables that influence the behaviour (Remenyi et al., 1998). It seems that researchers employing quantitative research approaches are committed to seeking one unambiguous "truth" about the social phenomenon studied.

In contrast, qualitative research approaches take the view that "reality is subjective and multiple as seen by participants in a study" (Creswell, 2003, p. 5). The view implies that there is no absolute truth; instead, there is a plurality of truths as different people may use different lenses to see the same thing. In this sense, reality is what people perceive it to be. Therefore, instead of a single reality, qualitative researchers see that there are multiple realities which are constructed by individuals based on their judgments and interpretations of a phenomenon (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). It seems that qualitative researchers are more likely to be committed to understanding the social phenomenon studied from the point of views of the participants. Moreover, this subjectivity that qualitative research approaches advocate allows qualitative researchers to become part of the researched by having active interactions with the research subject, rather than insisting their independence like quantitative researchers do (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

4.2.2 Epistemological assumptions: positivism versus interpretivism

Associated with the ontological issue are epistemological assumptions about the foundations of knowledge: how individuals learn about the world and how this knowledge is communicated to others (Long et al., 2000). Different views on 'reality' imply different grounds for knowledge. At one end of the objective-subjective continuum, knowledge is regarded as something concrete which can be acquired, whereas at the other end, knowledge is viewed as something which has to be personally experienced.

Quantitative research approaches follow the tradition of positivism (Creswell, 2003). Positivism refers to "any philosophy of social science that claims that the social science should directly emulate the objectivism and reductionism of 'the scientific method' of the natural sciences" (Morrow, 2006, p. 444). According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), the origins of positivism in Social Science can be traced to theorists like Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) from the 19th and early 20th centuries. From the perspective of positivism, "phenomena, of whatever description, should be studied in a scientific manner" (Lawson and Garrod, 2001, p. 186). As 'reality' is regarded as orderly, lawful, and predictable, quantitative research seeks to identify the lawful cause-effect relationships between variables that explain human behaviour and to explore the hypothesised relationships of one or more variables of interest. To describe or determine these relationships, positivism advocates precise and objective quantitative data amenable to comparative and statistical analyses so as to demonstrate an understanding of human behaviour.

Qualitative research approaches tend to take an interpretivist perspective. Interpretivists argue that human behaviour is a product of how people interpret their world, and it is important to understand "the processes through which human beings concretise their relationship to their world" (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). Therefore, qualitative research tries to understand social phenomena from individuals' own perspectives rather than search external causes or fundamental laws (Remenyi et al., 1998; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). Therefore, descriptive data are yielded by qualitative research methods to help explain and understand human experience.

4.2.3 The decision: qualitative research

There is no good or bad research approach, only suitable or non-suitable ones (Patton, 1990; Silverman, 2000). Morgan and Smircich (1980) suggest that the choice of the research approach should be made in consideration of the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying the two traditions. Therefore, the world view of the researcher and the type of research question posed should provide the grounds for the choice of the research approach.

Considering my view of the world, qualitative research approaches would reflect my ontological assumption. I do not agree with the positivist view that there is an objective reality 'out there' waiting to be discovered. On the contrary, I incline to take an interpretivist view that social phenomena need to be understood from individuals' own perspectives.

Qualitative research approaches are also deemed to be appropriate when taking the research question of this study into account. The aim of the research question of this study is to understand Chinese employees' perception of their selves and their work lives in MNCs. Such unquantifiable experience would be appropriately understood through the perspective of the research subject. Quantitative research approaches emphasising "facts" and "causes" would be inappropriate for this study. On the contrary, qualitative research approaches which have their emphasis on an individual's lived experience are suitable for this project, as they allow me as the researcher to see from the research subject's perspective.

Therefore, considering my world view and the research question posed, a qualitative research approach was chosen for this research.

4.3 Hermeneutics

Prasad and Prasad (2002) suggest that "qualitative research" is more like an umbrella term which covers a wide range of qualitative research methods, such as critical theory, discourse analysis, ethnography, grounded theory analysis, hermeneutics, narrative analysis, to name a few. Among these methods, hermeneutics is used for this research because of the prominent characteristic of this research method, which is the freedom to adopt different perspectives to inquiry. In this research, both western and Chinese perspectives were considered to help understand the phenomenon under study.

According to Ormiston and Schrift (1989), the term "hermeneutics" appeared as early as ancient Greece. Hermeneutics originally meant biblical interpretation, but it has been extended to other areas like philology (philological hermeneutics) and jurisprudence (juridical hermeneutics).

Hermeneutics was initially regarded as a technique exclusively for interpreting the Bible, but Johann August Ernesti (1707–1781), a German thinker, transformed it to a general hermeneutics (Forster, 2007). His work strongly influenced the scholars in the German hermeneutics tradition, like Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Schleiermacher further contributed to the transition of hermeneutics towards a general theory (Prasad, 2002). Whilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) took the development of hermeneutics further, claiming that "the postulates of Schleiermacher's general theory of hermeneutics could be extended to the interpretation of social meaning complexes" (Prasad, 2002, p. 15). Therefore, hermeneutics is not restricted to understanding and interpreting texts; it can be employed to understand and interpret social phenomena.

4.3.1 Prejudices and contexts

Hermeneutics is not a research method for searching for 'the objective meaning' of the phenomenon under study. All the research participants (e.g. the researcher and the informants) contribute to the interpretation of the meaning of the phenomenon under examination.

Prior to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), hermeneutic scholars assumed that the meaning of a text was objective and the task of an interpreter was to recapture this objective meaning. Therefore, it was important for the interpreter to resist the temptation of falsely assimilating the concepts found to ones with which the interpreter was already familiar (Forster, 2007). However, as Forster (2007) points out, Hegel holds a very different position and he embraces the assimilation of past meanings to the interpreter's own meanings and thoughts. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) takes Hegel's view further and emphasises the importance of the researcher's pre-understandings of the phenomenon. These pre-understandings refer to the researcher's preformed ideas and perceptions about the phenomenon, which could come from the researcher's experience. Gadamer (1989) calls these pre-understandings "prejudices" to the understanding of the phenomenon. He uses the term "prejudices" in a neutral sense; he does not perceive prejudices as inevitably negative causing aversive effects on the interpretation, and considers that prejudices could also have positive impact on the interpretation (p. 295). However, how could researchers distinguish the two? Gadamer explains that when their prejudices are challenged by the meaning of the text encountered (or the phenomenon under study), researchers then can tell which of their prejudices are unproductive and hinder their understanding of the text. Therefore, a researcher using hermeneutics as the research method should not simply confirm his or her prejudices, but be ready to give up the prejudices that do not work out in light of the phenomenon. In this study, it is suspected that some of the western perspectives or management perspectives, which have dominated the field for a long time, could be the "prejudices" that hinder the understanding of the phenomenon under study. For example, in Chapter 2, some expatriate managers believed that lack of initiative and analytical skills were the reasons for Chinese employees' reluctance to express opinions, and some management researchers attributed this to the Chinese education system. If one insists that these are the reasons for Chinese employees' restrained behaviour, one might lose the chance to understand the Chinese employees' behaviour from their own perspective. While the existing views in the field could be a starting point, one should not clutch at the ideas by resisting other possible explanations.

Researchers should be conscious not only of their own prejudices, but also the horizons of other participants of the research. As pointed out before, the interpretation or understanding of the phenomenon is a joint effort of all the participants. Therefore, it is important for researchers to take the context (e.g. history, culture, tradition, language) that, say, the informants are situated in, into account. That could be the frame of reference for understanding the lived experience of the informants, thus the phenomenon under study. As Prasad (2002) points out if researchers ignore the context of the phenomenon, they might always think that the phenomenon in a given culture belongs to the culture they are in and try to understand the phenomenon using their prejudices, and that could lead to misunderstanding. For example, as illustrated by Xu (2008), when a western researcher attempts to understand Chinese subjects' work behaviour using the work behaviour in the American culture as a standard, he or she might misinterpret some of the Chinese subjects' behaviour. Therefore, it is crucial for the researcher to explain the behaviour in the Chinese culture so as to generate further layers to the understanding.

4.3.2 Dialogue and the fusion of horizons

Gadamer believes that the interpretation of a text is a result of a dialogue between the text and the interpreter. For Gadamer, if researchers want to understand a text, they cannot be objective outsiders trying to interpret the text by remaining outside but should be active participants by engaging in a conversation with the text. By the same token, the meaning or the interpretation of the phenomenon under study is created through the interaction of the researcher and the informants through a constant dialogue.

Gadamer regards a genuine dialogue as being unpredictable, as it takes "its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led" (1989, p. 385). Therefore, researchers should not presuppose to know the truth, but remain open to others' position and allow the others to say something to them. This is what Gadamer describes as "fusion of horizons" (1989, p. 304). By fusing their horizons, researchers 'expand' their pre-understanding to integrate the horizons of the informants and the phenomenon, and thus arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the text.

A dialogue is two-way. Just as the horizons of the researcher influence the interpretation of the phenomenon under study, the horizons of the informants and the phenomenon also help the researcher to discard his or her unproductive prejudices—their pre-understandings that do not help make sense of the phenomenon. Therefore, a proper dialogue could help the researcher reach a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon than when researchers simply assign their 'pre-determined' meaning to the phenomenon and does not engage in such a dialogue. If researchers only rely on their pre-understandings to interpret the phenomenon, they would not look beyond what they have already known and they might miss the chance to reveal additional layers of understanding.

4.3.3 Hermeneutic circle

Hermeneutic circle works to combine the different horizons together, which is the fusion of horizons. The concept of the hermeneutic circle is developed by Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). The hermeneutic circle is the process of understanding a text (phenomenon) hermeneutically. The understanding of the text goes through "a process in which the meaning of the separate parts is determined by the global meaning of the text, as it anticipated" (Kvale, 1996, p. 47). The understanding of the parts changes the understanding of the whole, and in turn, the understanding of the whole influences the meaning of the parts. It is more like a circle or spiral of understanding. While Heidegger perceives that the process only required cycles of self-reference that situated understanding of their prejudices in individuals, Gadamer reconceptualises the hermeneutic circle as an interactive process that entails conversations with others to reach a new understanding of the text (phenomenon).

When researchers approach the phenomenon under study, they are guided by their prejudices to understand the phenomenon. When their prejudices do not help explain the phenomenon, they then seek to revise their horizons by exposure to the views or horizons of others. How do researchers know that their prejudices do not help their understanding of the phenomenon under study? Gadamer advises, "Our task is to expand the unity of the understood meaning centrifugally. The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed" (1989, p. 291). When researchers' prejudices do not help achieve this harmony, they need to include other perspectives, say, the perceptions of the participants of the study. By including and merging different perspectives, researchers could reach a comprehensive interpretation of text (phenomenon).

4.3.4 A hermeneutic framework

Based on the concept of hermeneutic circle, Cole and Avison (2007) propose a six-stage hermeneutic framework for research. Stage one is the explication of prejudices. This stage requires researchers first to clarify their position in relation to the phenomenon under study, and then create a critical self-awareness. They need to be clear about their own personal and theoretical preconceptions.

Stage two is formulating lines of enquiry. Researchers use the products of explication to formulate the lines of enquiry and drive the research process, including the research design, data collection method, and data analysis strategies.

Stage three is conducting the active interview. Following Holstein and Gubrium's advice, Cole and Avison see the active interview as an interview in which the interviewer and the interviewee are regarded "as equal partners in constructing meaning around an interview event" (2007, p. 825). In the active interview, the participants talk about a topic that is of interest to both. The main task of the interview is to understand the meaning offered by the interviewee, which requires the interviewer to be open to the interviewee and willing to take the interviewee's perspectives into account. By doing so, the interviewer could go beyond his or her own preliminary understanding of the phenomenon and reach a new understanding.

Stage four is analysing *a priori* codes. In this stage the data are displayed for the purpose of reflection and reconstruction. Sanders (1982) proposes different levels of analysis. The first is naïve reading which requires the researcher to read the text several times in order to have a whole picture of the text. Then the researcher moves to structural analysis which takes a methodical approach to interpretation. Structural analysis seeks to identify and formulate themes which convey essential meanings of lived experience. After the themes are summarised in the structural analysis, the researcher moves to form a comprehensive understanding of the text using the themes identified as codes for further analysis. At this level of analysis, the text is also reread with critical reflections on the researcher's pre-understanding.

Stage five is breakdown in prejudices. This stage calls for the researcher to expand his or her appreciation of different horizons leading to the researcher's initial understanding of the phenomenon under study. This is a stage of further reflection in which the researcher tries to find new perspectives to make sense of the new information that emerges from the data; in particular, the details of the part (the phenomenon under study) with the whole (e.g. the cultural context). The aim of this stage is not to confirm the researcher's pre-understanding, but to help the researcher reach a new understanding of the phenomenon.

Stage six is fusion of horizons. A fusion of horizons between the researcher and the research subject is achieved when a consensus of shared meaning leads to a more informed and sophisticated interpretation creating new concepts or understandings that move beyond originally held meanings. During the whole process of the interpretation, the researcher continues to revise and fine tune different elements into a coherent whole. In other words, interpretation continues even when the researcher is presenting and discussing the data. Cole and Avison perceive that "interpretation also occurs in the rendering of material understandable to others beyond the participants used in any proposed study" (2007, p. 826). Perhaps the interpretation still continues when others read the material.

Cole and Avison's research framework was considered in this study when thematising the research topic, and collecting and analysing the interview data about the lived experience of the research subject, the Chinese employees, in the workplace.

4.4 Empirical study

This research project aims to investigate the lived experience of Chinese employees who work in MNCs: How do they make sense of their selves in relation to their expatriate manager and their working life in MNCs?

This sub-section gives an account of the preparatory work before the empirical study, the process of data collection, and data analysis.

4.4.1 Preparation for the fieldwork

Before the empirical study takes place, preparatory work is needed. Preparation involves two major steps: thematising the research topic and deciding on the data collection method. When taking these steps, the first two stages of the hermeneutic framework proposed by Cole and Avison (2007) were considered.

4.4.1.1 Thematising the research topic

When considering a research topic, being Chinese, I naturally had an interest in issues related to China. This interest grew when learning that many economists projected the Chinese economy to be one of the world's largest in the coming decades, and an increasing number of international companies found ways to establish businesses in China. Thinking that an understanding of Chinese employees' lived experience working in MNCs would enhance the human resource management of these companies, I intended to carry out a study on this topic. As the researcher, I then reviewed the existing literature on the topic (Chapter 2) to determine whether a qualitative study would add value, and the literature review supported that.

After deciding that a study was worth conducting, a main research question was to be formulated. Based on the reflection on the literature review, it was determined that "the Chinese employees' sense of self", "the relationship with their expatriate manager" and "their working life in MNCs" were the key elements of the phenomenon under study. Subsequently, the main research question was formaulated as: How do Chinese employees make sense of their selves in relation to their expatriate manager and their working life in MNCs?

When thematising the research topic, as proposed in the hermeneutic framework, I went through the process of self-reflection is an attempt to uncover my own prejudices including my core attitudes and values. While being Chinese might enable me to understand the research subject—Chinese employees— better than, say, a non-Chinese researcher, it might also hinder my sensitivity to the views of the researcher subject. I might subconsciously speak for the Chinese employees 'mistaking' my view as theirs. The self-reflection sensitised me to the views of others by improving my ability to recognise discrepancy between my view and theirs. This self-reflection activity continued when analysing the interview data.

The explication of prejudices also involves creating a level of critical awareness about my conceptual frameworks that I intended to employ. As western theories have been dominant theories in the research field for quite some time (Prasad, 2003; Jack &

Westwood, 2006) and I received my university education in the UK, naturally I turned to western theories for conceptual frameworks to interpret my data. However, after reviewing the literature chosen (Section 3.2), possible insufficiency of using the conceptual frameworks derived from western theories was observed. Inspired by postcolonial theories, which has become increasingly important to provide insights to researchers for moving away from Eurocentric knowledge to alternative non-western knowledge (Kwek, 2003), non-western conceptual frameworks—Confuican and Taoist frameworks—were introduced to comprehend the lived experience of the research subject.

Postcolonial writers argue that understanding a non-western other from the perspective of a western self does not do justice to the non-western other's lived experience, as its voice is silenced. Only by allowing the non-western other to speak in its own terms can its voice be heard. When the voices of the non-western research subjects are heard, new layers of understanding of their lived experience could be reached and possible alternatives to the dominant western way of thinking could be explored.

4.4.1.2 Deciding on the data collection method

After finding the topic of interest to me, I then needed to decide what type of data collection method would be appropriate for the research. As the aim of the research was to investigate the lived experience of Chinese employees working in MNCs, in-depth interviewing was considered the most suitable method for this study. It encourages interviewees to discuss their views through narrations, which gives contextual clues to me to discover the interviewees' underlying assumptions that lead to their behaviour. This in turn would allow me to reach an understanding on how the Chinese employees made sense of their selves in relation to their expartiate manager and their work in the cross-cultural workplace.

Although in-depth interviewing was the main technique for collecting data, I also found chances to observe the working environment of the research subject, so as to have a holistic picture of the situation that the research subject was in. For example, on a few occasions, I spent a short period of time in the interviewees' offices observing the office environment and how the employees communicated with each other. On one occasion, I was even invited by one of the interviewees to have lunch in their staff canteen. However, these chances were rather limited.

In the following discussion, the focus is on in-depth interviewing, the main research technique for data collection in this research project.

4.4.1.3 Semi-structured interviews

Interviewing is widely used in research communities for generating data in the social world (Kvale, 1996). There are various forms of interviews. At one end are highly structured survey interviews in which a predetermined set of questions is asked. At the other end are the less structured ongoing conversations that anthropologists use to collect data, where the focus is on learning the local culture over a long period of time rather than on asking questions within a relatively short period of time.

As there are different forms of interviews, researchers need to consider their epistemological view for selecting a suitable form for their study. From a positivist epistemological position, the interviewer expects interviewees to provide "insight into their psychological and organisational lives outside of the interview situation" (King, 2004, p. 12). The interviews tend to be more structured than other qualitative research interviews, because there is a concern with the accuracy of interviewees' accounts and a need to ensure that the accounts from different interviewees can be systematically compared.

From an interpretivist position, interviewees' accounts are recognised as being shaped by the interview situation and may have a relationship to the interviewees' wider experience. For interpretivists, interviews are not regarded as a tool to gain insight into the real and 'objective' experience of the interviewee. Therefore, researchers do not aim at finding the definite version of truth; rather, they seek to present as wide a variety of contexts as possible within which the interviewees can display the range of discursive practices available to them. As researchers seek to develop their understanding of the phenomenon, emphasising the access of the beliefs, sense-making and inner motives of interviewees, they incline to using semi-structured or unstructured interviews in their research and the interviews tend to be lengthy. The interviews often generate thick or rich descriptions of the interviewee's lived experience and the meaning that he or she ascribes to it (Gephart, 2004).

Considering my interpretivist position, semi-structured interviews were used for collecting data to understand the meaning of the phenomenon under study from the research subject's perspectives. I also shared the view that there could be an indefinite number of possible interpretations of a phenomenon, and the interview content should be a co-constructed effort of both the interviewer and the interviewee. Using semi-structured interviews would allow interviewees to take the lead in the interviews and allow them talk about the topics which they are interested in and find important.

4.4.1.4 Characteristics of interviewing

When using interviewing to collect data, especially in-depth interviewing, researchers need to bear in mind that the interview process is not often simple and straightforward. Rubin and Rubin (1995) describe an interview as taking the form of a conversation but with an emphasis on researchers asking questions and listening, and respondents answering. Too many interviewers have taken this literally. They design the interview questions, contact interviewees, schedule the interviews, and then conduct the interviews in a seemingly objective manner; whereas the interviewees dutifully supply answers to the questions being asked. Fontana (2002) suggests that this traditional way to conduct interviews assumes there is an objective, singular truth out there in the social world, and we can get to the truth through the use of rigorous interview techniques. In this tradition, interviewees have often been regarded as "passive vessels of answers for experiential questions put to them by interviewers" (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002). This is more like the positivist view of interviews. This method of interviewing fosters an asymmetric relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, where the interviewer controls the interview, and the interviewee just responds passively.

Holstein and Gubrium (2003) argue that interviewing is being revolutionised and that the new view that opposes the traditional view requires new lenses to see the interviewing process. Their view is in line with the interpretivist views on interviews. They point out that while the form of interview remains more or less the same, there is a growing consensus that the interview is more than just a simple information-gathering activity but is a social activity in which knowledge is constructed. As knowledge is constructed, both the interviewer and the interviewee are expected to take an active role in the interview. That means the interviewer should see the interviewee as an equal partner in the co-construction of the interview content, allowing the interviewee to take a more active role in, for example, deciding the issues that he or she would like to talk about in the interview. Interviews are now viewed as an interactional, collaborative accomplishment which allows the interviewer to make a contribution in knowledge production without 'bracketing out' the interviewer's presuppositions and the interviewee to articulate his or her own voice or story authentically (Mishler, 1986). Instead of responding passively, interviewees are now allowed to talk about the things they are interested in or things they think are important, which is what Cole and Avison (2007) describe as the active interview.

In this research, semi-structured in-depth interviewing was adopted following the advice from Holstein and Gubrium (2003) and Mishler (1986). The research subject, the Chinese employees who participated in the project, was seen as an equal partner rather than as "passive vessels of answers." The interviewees were encouraged to elaborate their views on the themes and were encouraged to initiate related new themes that they were interested in, though a set of questions related to the themes were set before the interview to help me (as the interviewer) stay focused.

4.4.1.5 Interview questions

Before doing the fieldwork, I needed to know what questions should be asked in the interview for answering the key research question, and I integrated the research question into specific interview questions so as to explore the research topic.

Both Gaskell (2002) and King (2004) advise that during the development of the interview questions, researchers need to make reference to the literature, their own personal knowledge and experience of the topics, and informal preliminary work such as discussions with people who have personal experience of the topics, which is in line with stages one and two proposed by Cole and Avison (2007). Warren (2002) stresses the importance of the researcher remaining "flexible and attentive to the variety of meanings that may emerge as the interview progresses" (p. 87). In line with Warren's argument, King (2004) emphasises that the interview guide does not end at the start of the first interview; on the contrary, it may need to be modified through use for subsequent interviews.

This was certainly true in this research project. In the circular nature of hermeneutic enquirey, the interview questions went through a number of modifications when they did not seem to fit in. Some of the questions turned out to be uninteresting, so these were dropped after the first series of interviews. For example, the interviewees were initially asked whether an older/a younger colleague would handle the confrontation with the expatriate supervisor differently. However, most of them had very little to say about this topic. Some just said they did not really know. Others responded that there was no big age difference among the Chinese employees, so they could not really give any information to me.

Equally, some new issues came up during the interviews, and new interview questions were included to capture these issues. For example, the question "If you were asked to give advice to expatriate managers on how they could manage their Chinese subordinates, what would you say?" was added after the first few interviews when I found that a number of the interviewees commented that expatriate managers did not really know them.

Some wording in the questions was also fine-tuned during the process. For instance, the interviewees were asked to talk about the "problems" and "conflicts" they had with their expatriate supervisors. The first response from them was that they did not have any problems in their relationship with their supervisors, and they were reluctant to answer the question. I then noticed that the words "problems" and "conflicts" have a strong negative connotation to them. This could be because of the Chinese value *he* (harmony). Admitting that they had "problems" and "conflicts" might mean that they were incapable of maintaining a harmonious work relationship with their supervisor, which was not a right thing for them. Subsequently, the word "difficulty" was used instead. The interviewees in the later interviews seemed to be more willing to give detailed stories about the difficulties they had in their relationship with their expatriate supervisors.

After several modifications, 12 specific questions in three areas of interest were developed.

Area 1: Supervisor-supervisee relationship

This aimed to find out how the interviewees got along with their expatriate supervisors and how they positioned their selves in the relationship.

1. How would you describe your relationship with your supervisor?
2. Did you encounter difficulty in your relationship with your supervisor?
3. How did you handle those difficulties?
4. How would you define a competent supervisor?
5. If you were asked to give advice to expatriate managers on how they could manage their Chinese subordinates, what would you say?

Area 2: Working in MNCs

This aimed to find out what the interviewees expected from the job/career in MNCs.

1. Why did you choose to work in an MNC?
2. What do you expect to get from your job?
3. Does the MNC you are with satisfy your expectation for a job?
4. How would you see yourself in five years' time in your career?

Area 3: Practice of the organisation

This aimed to find out how the interviewees considered the organisation's practice and whether they were content with it.

1. How do you feel about working in this MNC?
2. Which part of your company's practice do you like, and which part do you dislike?
3. If you could change the company's practice, how would you change it?

Questions in area 1 seek to answer the first part of the key research question: How Chinese employees make sense of their selves in relation with their expatriate manager; questions in areas 2 and 3 explore the second part of the research question: How Chinese employees make sense of themselves in their working life in MNCs.

4.4.1.6 Sampling for the interviews

Another crucial question that I needed to answer before the interviews could be conducted was: who could be interviewed? Warren (2002) suggests a few ways for finding respondents, including using a prior research design, theoretical sampling, "snowball" or convenience design, and key informants. Without an *a priori* research design that I could rely on, I made use of social networks in which I had to locate interviewees who fulfilled the criteria of the targeted research subject and recruited the participants through a "snowball" process. This involved asking some of the interviewees for referrals using their social networks. Relying on social networks for recruiting respondents was very effective throughout the data collection phase, and most of the participants turned out to be very helpful.

Data were collected from a sample of Chinese employees working in two Chinese cities, namely, Beijing and Guangzhou. The cities were chosen because they were among the first batch of cities that opened to foreign investments which means that there is currently a substantial presence of international firms in these cities. I originally intended to include Shanghai in the research, but without good connections there, not enough informants were referred. I was only able to interview three Chinese employees working in MNCs.

The interviewees were obtained through contacts and referrals. Each of them needed to have the following characteristics: (1) being mainland Chinese, (b) working in a multinational company, and (c) being (directly or indirectly) supervised by an expatriate.

Rather than using random sampling as in the case of quantitative research, purposive sampling is often employed in qualitative research (Kuzel, 1999). Following this advice, I deliberately included "being (directly or indirectly) supervised by an expatriate" as one of the criteria for selecting interviewees, arguing that Chinese employees who had a personal contact with an expatriate supervisor would be able to provide more information about how they worked with an expatriate manager compared with those who did not have such contact.

The sample of the Chinese employees comprises 27 respondents from small, medium, and large international companies with ages ranging from mid-20s to mid-40s.

4.4.2 The fieldwork

After making necessary arrangements such as setting interview schedules and contacting the interviewees, I went into the field to conduct the interviews and collect data, which is the third stage of the hermeneutic framework proposed by Cole and Avison (2007).

4.4.2.1 In-depth interviews

To ensure that the interview is "fruitful" during the interview process, two important points need to be paid attention to. The first concerns the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. Douglas (1985) sees that the challenge for the interviewer is to create a "situated friendship" with the interviewee, since in the interpretivist perspective the quality of the interaction determines the quality of the findings. Johnson (2002) advises researchers to maintain a friendly and interested manner in the interviews. The interviewer needs to build trust and a good rapport with the interviewees, so that they feel more comfortable talking about their work or expressing their views on certain phenomena. As the interviewee is no longer regarded as a detached subject, nor is he or she conceived of as a passive vessel-like subject, building a good relationship will encourage the interviewee to speak in his or her own voice. I followed Johnson's advice by listening attentively and responding to the interviewees' stories with appropriate facial expressions and gestures. I found that most of the interviewees enjoyed talking to me about their work and their world views when they felt at ease and that the researcher was interested in their stories. In fact, on one occasion, when I finished the interview and switched off the tape recorder, the interviewee asked whether he could continue the conversation. On a couple of occasions, the interviewees were not very enthusiastic in answering the researcher's questions at the beginning, but they opened up in the middle of the interview. There was only one interviewee who was totally unwilling to give his stories to the researcher, and all his answers to the questions were extremely short, with the interview lasting for 15 minutes only. I suspected that this particular interviewee agreed to be interviewed only because he was asked to do so by his senior.

The second point is about how to record the interview data. It is true to a certain extent that people do not remember every single detail of what they see or hear; instead, these memories are organised into some coherent categories based on the individual's lived experience. Therefore, it is important for the interviewer to tape-record the interviews to obtain verbatim records of those interviews. Johnson points out that handwritten field notes are important for the research, but they are "far inferior to tape recording for the in-depth interviews" (p. 111). Having the interview taped allows the interviewer to concentrate on what the respondent says as compared to note taking. It is crucial to gain the respondents' permission to record the interview to capture their points of view and world views better. The interviews in this research took between 30 minutes and two hours, and all were recorded and then transcribe. In the interviews that the researcher conducted so far, only two out of the 27 interviewees refused to have their sessions taped, and two other interviews were not taped because of problems with the tape recorder. However, I noticed that I could not just rely on the tape recorder because some interesting narratives took place after I had switched off the tape recorder. Therefore, field notes were still important, and I needed to make more notes right after the interview while the discussions were still fresh in my mind. The notes would be analysed along with the corresponding interviewees' transcripts. The analysis of the notes would help provide a holistic picture of the situation, which is encouraged for researchers taking a qualitative approach (Cassell and Symon, 1994).

Altogether, 17 interviewees from Beijing were interviewed. All except one interview with these interviewees were conducted in Beijing. One of the interviewees was interviewed three times, with two interviews conducted in Beijing and one conducted in Hong Kong. The one conducted in Hong Kong was not recorded. Two of the interviewees refused to have their interviews recorded; therefore, among the 19 interviews, 16 of them were recorded. For the interviews that were not recorded, notes were written during the interview and were reflected on afterwards.

Ten interviewees from Guangzhou were interviewed. Eight out of the ten interviews were recorded; two were not recorded because of the problem with the tape recorder. Judging from the data collected, it seemed that "the point of redundancy" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was reached when 29 interviews were completed, and no more additional information would be given. Besides, it was becoming difficult to get any more referrals, especially in Guangzhou.

4.4.2.2 Problems with in-depth interviews

In cross-cultural research like this one, possible problems in the interviews can be caused by language if the researchers do not speak or understand the language used in the culture being studied. Fortunately, I do not need to be too worried about the challenge brought by language, as I speak both Cantonese (the Chinese dialect used in Guangzhou, one of the cities in which the interviews were conducted) and Putonghua, commonly known as Mandarin (the official Chinese language used in Beijing, the other city in which the interviews were conducted).

However, some minor problems still existed. First, I sometimes found it difficult to understand the interviewees' answers when they had a very heavy Beijing accent. Second, I occasionally did not get the meanings of the colloquial expressions used by the interviewees.

When encountering these problems, I first sought clarification by repeating what had been heard. Sometimes, I needed to rely on written Chinese in order to seek clarification. Occasionally, both the interviewee and I expressed the terms in English so as to get the meaning across. On one occasion, the interviewee had such a strong Beijing accent that I could not understand some of his answers. As I did not want to frustrate or irritate the interviewee by interrupting him too often for clarification, I tried to guess the meaning from the context.

There were two other problems other than the problems brought by language. The first was related to time constraint. As in-depth interviews tend to be long, I could only arrange a few interviews in one day. Moreover, some of the interviewees would cut the interview short because they could not spend too much time on the interview. On one occasion, an interviewee needed to rush to the airport for his business trip. Therefore, I was not able to follow up an interesting issue that the interviewee mentioned towards the end of the interview.

Another related problem concerned my mental and physical strength. Conducting an in-depth interview requires the researcher's full attention to the interviewee's narrative. Very often, the researcher would feel very tired after two or three interviews, and I could finish only maximum four interviews in one day. Consequently, I needed to travel quite frequently to the two cities to conduct interviews. This indeed generated time and financial pressure on me.

4.4.3 After the field work

After the interviews were conducted, they needed to be transcribed and analysed.

4.4.3.1 Transcribing the interviews

The interviews were recorded in the process, and these recordings needed to be transcribed before they were analysed. As King (2004) points out, transcribing interviews takes a long time. Even an experienced transcriber may take up to 10 hours to transcribe a one-hour interview. Considering the time constraint, I decided to hire two transcribers to do the transcription. Both of the transcribers are Chinese, and they speak both Cantonese (the Chinese dialect) and Putonghua (the official Chinese language). They also understand English, which was important, as English was sometimes used in the interviews.

Taking the advice of Poland (2003), I worked with the transcribers as a team to ensure the transcription quality. I first briefed the transcribers on the background and objectives of the research. This helped the transcribers understand the interview data better when they did the transcription.

Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) strongly recommend that researchers do at least some transcription themselves, if they rely on others to do transcription for them. They argue that it is important for researchers as it is the first step of analysis. To ensure the quality of the transcription, I followed Jovchelovitch and Bauer's advice, and transcribed a few interviews myself so as to have a good grasp of the material and have a better picture of what difficulties the transcribers might encounter. As Poland (2003) suggests, I also gave feedback to the transcribers after reviewing the initial transcripts, so as to handle possible problems. On top of giving feedback to the transcribers, I also invited the transcribers to discuss with me the difficulties they encountered during the transcription process. For example, the transcribers commented that they sometimes could not hear what the interviewees were saying. In some cases, it was due to the quality of the audio clips. Help was therefore sought from a technician, and the problems were solved quickly.

To maximise the transcription quality, Poland (2003) proposes a number of strategies. Adopting a notation system for transcribing the recorded interviews will help transcribers capture some of the non-verbal features, such as pauses, laugher, and intonation. For example, researchers who are interested in conversation analysis (CA) employ very detailed notation systems. As the main concern of this research was not the methods by which the research subject produced orderly social interaction, the use of CA notation systems was therefore considered to be too detailed and time consuming for the researcher. After all, a trade-off exists between level of details and availability of the resources required to achieve that level. Therefore, a simplified notation system was designed for this research. The system (see Table 4.1, p. 114) was based on Silverman's (1997) simplified transcription symbols and Poland's (2003) abbreviated instructions for transcribers.

The notation system designed also intends to capture meaning carried by intonation, as without these details, information might be lost. However, the system would not be able to capture other features like the setting of the venue or the posture of the interviewee because these pieces of information could be better captured by the researcher's field notes.

4.4.3.2 Problems with the transcription process

Poland (2003) argues that many things may occur during the transcription process that may affect the quality of transcription. This is especially true when the transcription is done by others, instead of the researcher. The following are the three problems that I found in the transcription process.

First, some interviewees used a lot of run-on sentences in the interview, and the transcribers might need to make a judgment on where the sentences started or stopped. A wrong judgment could alter the meaning of the information given by the interviewees.

Second, information might also be omitted when the transcribers went forward and backward in the tape when they needed to listen to a passage more than once, and they might not be able to pick up where they left off. Errors could also be made when the transcribers mistake a word with a similar pronunciation for another.

Third, the transcribers also found difficulties in understanding the accent of the Beijing interviewees. They might misunderstand the information given by the interviewees.

Although some researchers advocate respondent checks to enhance the accuracy of the transcripts (e.g., Bloor, 2001; Guba and Lincoln 1988), I agree with Poland (2003) that there may be more cons than pros to this. For example, interviewees may change their stories if they are invited to read the transcript. Anxiety may also be created in the interviewees when they get to see what they have said in print. Therefore, to overcome these three problems mentioned, I decided not to use member checks in the research project. Instead, the researcher would check the transcripts against the original recordings when doing the analysis to maximise the transcription quality.

4.4.3.3 Analysing the interview data

The data analysis in this project was to find out, through the respondents' lived experience, how they understood their selves in relation to their expatriate managers and working life in MNCs. When analysing the data, the fourth to sixth stages of the hermeneutic framework of Cole and Avison (2007) were observed.

During the interviews in this research project, the conversations were audio-recorded with the prior consent of the interviewees. The interviews were then transcribed into detailed verbal descriptions before proceeding to analysis. Altogether there were around 300 pages of transcripts. Following the hermeneutic research framework, data collected through the active interview were displayed in this stage for reflection and reconstruction.

The transcripts were read for several times for different level of data analysis. According to Sanders (1982), the first is naïve reading. The transcripts were first read for a general understanding of all the conversations. This is very important in the hermeneutic circle that understanding the whole helps examine the parts; understanding all the interviews as a whole would help me understand the different elements from individual interviews to put them into a coherent whole. That being said, it is important to point out that the whole could also refer to the context (e.g. MNCs operating in China) and the parts refer to the interviewees' stories. Therefore, when interpreting the interview data, I also tried to situate the data in the context.

Then, at the second level, structural analysis, I went through five transcripts first looking at meaning units and making a list of emerging themes. I then turned the themes into categories. Following Tesch's (1990) advice on a systematic process for analysing data, I used abbreviations for the categories and arranged them in order. After that, I made use of this list of themes to code some of the transcripts, checking whether any new themes emerged. When a coding system (the abbreviated categories) was finalised, I then assembled the data material accordingly.

At the third level, the transcripts were reread to generate a comprehensive understanding of the material using the prior codes identified in the second level of data analysis. During this level of analysis, a summary sheet to document all the necessary information on each interview was produced. The summary sheet was designed with reference to the themes emerged in the study. In the sheet, there were spaces for me to write down verbatim quotations, re-coded data (in key words), and research insights related to the themes for analysis. Then the results that show the important points present in the themes and reflections would be reported.

When rereading the material, I constantly reflected on my prejudices and identified the unproductive ones to be discarded, which is suggested in the fifth stage of the hermeneutic framework. As advised in hermeneutics, I reassessed my understanding of the phenomenon and tried to make sense of the new information derived from the data. I sought to explain the new information by using the conceptual frameworks from the west, which could partially explain the phenomenon (Section 6.2)

According to the hermenutic framework, the final stage is fusion of horizons. As suggested by Gadamer (1989), researchers could expand their pre-understandings by integrating the horizons of others, and then they would be able to arrive at a new understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, by bringing in the conceptual frameworks from the non-western sources—the Confucian and Taoist traditions—additional layers to the understanding of the phenomenon were revealed (Section 6.3). Through the dialogues between the western and non-western conceptual frameworks, appropriately informed and sophisticated interpretation creating fresh insigths or understandings that move beyond originally held meanings were possible to achieve.

4.4.3.4 Problems with data analysis

As Patton (1990) points out, the data generated by qualitative methods can be overwhelming, and data analysis entails hard work that can cause anxiety, especially to novice qualitative researchers. Gaskell (2000) shares Patton's view and suggests that data analysis is not an easy task, especially when there could be a number of voices heard in the interviews. For example, the interviewees might speak from their respective roles as a supervisee or a supervisor. Sometimes, the interviewees might speak for others or for themselves. To capture the multi-voices that might appear in the interviews, I needed to be sensitive when the interviewees shifted their position and to comprehend the data with awareness line by line.

Furthermore, the 'voice' (or in Gadamer's term, prejudices) could also come from me, the researcher, when I interpreted the data, as I would bring in my background, experiences, and knowledge of the field when reading the text. Although in hermeneutics, the researcher's prejudices are considered the necessary conditions of understanding, unproductive prejudices would hinder the understanding and lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, I needed to bring in the element of reflection when analysing the transcripts so that I would be able to get rid of unproductive prejudices, which do not help to make sense of the interview data. To find out what my unproductive prejudices could be in this cross-cultural study, I turned to postcolonial theory for help in my relection.

As Calás and Smircich (1999) rightly point out, many western researchers are blind to their own ethnocentrism when studying the non-western other. These researchers tend to make Eurocentric knowledge the only appropriate knowledge and reduce the other to "a timeless essence that pervades, shapes, and defines the significant of the people and events that constitute it" (Kwek, 2003, p. 130). Postcolonial theory highlights the dangers of regarding western ideology and practices as a universal norm along with its inadequacies and undesirable consequences (Westwood, 2001). Although I am not a western researcher, due to my educational background, I inclined to follow the 'footsteps' of most western researchers. Postcolonial theory thus helped me reflect on my own assumptions (prejudices) and be ready to bring in non-western conceptual frameworks to develop a possible alternative understanding of the phenomenon.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has given an account of both the theoretical considerations of the research project and the actual research process. It was not the aim of this chapter to contribute to the debate on the adequacy of research methodology, which will be discussed in Chapter

8, but to give a brief discussion of ontological and epistemological issues to justify the use of the hermeneutics research method, a qualitative research approach, in this study.

It has outlined the six-stage hermeneutic framework for research proposed by Cole and Avison (2007): stage one is the explication of prejudices, stage two formulating lines of enquiry, Stage three conducting the active interview, stage four analysing *a priori* codes, stage five breakdown in prejudices and stage six fusion of horizons. Cole and Avison's research framework was considered when thematising the research topic, and collecting and analysing the interview data.

It was also the aim of this chapter to recount the research procedure in three phases: the preparation for the fieldwork, the fieldwork, and activities after the fieldwork, showing difficulties that the researcher encountered and their solutions. In the account of the three phases, how each stage of the hermeneutic framework was used to inform the research procedure was also spelt out.

Table 4.1: Simplified notation system

Features	Transcription symbols
Emphasis	Use underscoring to indicate strong emphasis: e.g. I don't see <u>why</u> that's a problem.
Garbled speech	Use brackets and question mark to indicate the words are possible hearings: e.g. I've been (here for about?) nine years. Use brackets and three questions to indicate that the passages cannot be heard. The duration of the garbled speech is also indicated: e.g. My boss went (??? 1'13"), that's how I feel.
Pauses	Use a series of dots (...) to indicate short pauses: e.g. George thought it's my idea to ... talk to the boss. Use a series of dots (...) and description in parentheses to indicate long pauses: e.g. I certainly ... (long pause) I don't know.
Non-verbal features e.g. laughing, using an angry voice, showing disappointment	Use curly brackets to include remarks on non-verbal features and / or description of the situation: e.g. Well, you know, he shouldn't have done that! {She is angry.}

Sources: Silverman, D. (1997). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*, 2nd edn. London: Sage; Poland, B. D. (2003). Transcription quality. In J. A. Holstein and J. F. Gubrium (Eds.), *Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 267–288.

Chapter 5: The Voice of the Chinese Employees—Findings

5.1 Introduction

This research aims to answer the key research question: How do Chinese employees make sense of their selves in relation to their expatriate managers and their work life in MNCs? To answer the question, a qualitative study was carried out. To understand the lived experience of the research subject—Chinese employees working in MNCs—in-depth interviews were conducted in Beijing and Guangzhou. These interviews revealed how the notion of self informed their attitudes and behaviour. The interviews were conducted between April 2004 and June 2006.

Beijing is the capital of the People's Republic of China. It is among the most developed cities in China and home to 26 Fortune Global 500 companies, the third most in the world ("Global 500 2009: Cities", 2009). Guangzhou is the third largest city in China and the provincial capital of Guangdong Province, southern China. It is one of mainland China's leading commercial and manufacturing regions.

Beijing and Guangzhou were among the first batch of cities that opened to foreign investments. The increase of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to China has been remarkable since the adaptation of the open door policy. China is the largest receiver of FDI among developing countries today. In 2006, around 8,000 FIEs existed in Beijing (Bureau of Statistics of Beijing, 2007) and around 8,000 in Guangzhou (Bureau of Statistics of Guangzhou, 2007).

Altogether, 27 Chinese employees working in MNCs were interviewed—eleven were female and 16 were male. Eighteen interviewees were from Beijing and nine from Guangzhou. The interviewees' ages ranged from the mid-20s to mid-40s; seven were in their 20s, 15 in their 30s and five in their 40s. Comparatively speaking, the interviewees from Beijing were more mature and experienced than those from Guangzhou. (The interviewee profiles are given in Table 5.1, pp. 151–153.)

All except one interview lasted between 30 minutes and two hours, and most were recorded and then transcribed. One particular interview lasted less than 15 minutes because the interviewee (Mr XX) was uncooperative. All his answers to the interview questions were very brief and he refused to elaborate his answers when invited. Therefore, that interview was excluded from the data. I was puzzled by the interviewee's behaviour and suspected that he agreed to be interviewed by me because he was asked by his senior. Perhaps Mr XX did not want to reject his senior's request, but he had no intention to talk to a stranger about his view of the company or his relationship with the expatriate manager. Although Mr XX's interview itself did not provide much information, Mr XX's behaviour was deemed to be an example of how Chinese employees try to maintain harmonious work relationships, which is one of the themes that emerged from the interview data.

Following the hermeneutic approach to data analysis discussed in Section 4.3, the transcripts were read several times. When the interview data were examined closely, seven prominent and interrelated themes emerged in the three areas of interest listed in Section 4.4.1.5: "supervisor-supervisee relationship", "working in MNCs" and "practice of the organisation".

5.2 Supervisor-supervisee relationship

The questions in this area sought to shed light on the first part of the key research question: How Chinese employees make sense of their selves in relation to their expatriate managers (hereafter managers). Five interview questions were designed. The first three asked the interviewees how they got along with their expatriate supervisors, and the last two tried to find out how the interviewees described a good supervisor.

5.2.1 *How did you handle difficulties in your relationship with your supervisor?*

When talking about their relationship with their managers, most of the interviewees admitted that they sometimes encountered difficulties; though only a few (e.g. Ms A, Beijing) described the difficulties as conflicts, many just referred to them as disagreements. While they admitted that sometimes they might have differences in their views, none of these interviewees perceived these differences as major problems as they regarded having differences as normal.

> *"As we are from different cultures, it's understandable that we may have differences when communicating with each other, but these are not big problems."* (Mr F, Beijing)

> *"We may have differences in opinions, but that's no big deal."* (Ms R, Guangzhou)

The interviewees were further asked how they would react when they found that their view was different from their managers'. The interviewees claimed that they would handle the differences by talking to their managers so that their managers would understand their opinion.

> *"I definitely will talk to my boss and tell him how I think."* (Ms A, Beijing)

> *"I like to talk things through. I'd talk to my boss, face-to-face. That's how I handle things... or I'd write to him. I did it once."* (Mr F, Beijing)

> *"When I raise an issue, I [would also] tell him (manager, British) my suggestion on how the issue could be handled... If [our views are] different, I would use lots of facts to show him that my suggestion is better."* (Ms R, Guangzhou)

No difference was noticed between the interviewees from Beijing and those from Guangzhou in handling disagreement with their managers: most of them, except a few younger interviewees (e.g. Ms X, Guangzhou; Mr W, Guangzhou), would make their view known to their managers.

5.2.1.1 *"We need to maintain harmony in the workplace."*

Although the interviewees were not reluctant in expressing their ideas, they would not insist on their views. Many interviewees (84.6%) claimed that it was important to maintain harmony in the workplace. Findings show that there was no big difference between female and male interviewees in their valuing a harmonious workplace. The data, however, revealed that older interviewees tended to value harmony more than younger interviewees did. To maintain harmony, the interviewees were very diplomatic in adopting a non-confrontational attitude in handling disagreement. Different ways were employed to avoid direct confrontation with their managers in public. Some of them said that they would keep silent first and wait for a proper time to persuade their managers again. They would not push their managers, but wait for the right moment to come.

> *"Perhaps, after a while, when the time is right, I'll bring up the issue again."* (Ms P, Beijing)

> *"...the only way is to let him (the manager, Swedish) try [his idea] out first. I think only when he runs into snags, he would then realise that he's wrong. I can then bring up my ideas again."* (Ms A, Beijing)

> *"Give him some time; he (the manager, American) will see it. You don't need to push. When he realizes you are right, he will come back to you."* (Ms T, Guangzhou)

Findings reveal that female interviewees tended to adopt a "wait-and-see" approach more than male interviewees. While some interviewees chose not to take any assertive action, some interviewees, especially male interviewees, inclined to make adjustments to reach a compromise.

> *"I will talk to him (the manager, French), maybe try to understand his view. If possible, talk to him face to face... and make him see my view as well. See if we can have a common ground."* (Mr F, Beijing)

Some interviewees declared that when seeking a compromise, they would not give up their principle and at the same time they would not force their managers to give up theirs. To them, it would be a win-win situation.

> *"We (I) will make adjustment as long as it doesn't violate the major principle, and as long as it doesn't go beyond his (the manager, Swedish) framework."* (Mr C, Beijing)

> *"[I] will insist on the essentials. As long as [I] get the essentials agreed; for other small differences, I don't really mind."* (Mr K, Beijing)

When presenting their ideas, the interviewees were also tactful. They would try to present their ideas in a diplomatic way, so that they could avoid embarrassment caused by the direct confrontation with their managers.

> *"I will have my own view, though I would try to present in a way that may please him, youknow, music to his ears."* (Ms E, Beijing)

> *"We could use a 'half serious, half joking' manner to bring up the ideas. ... That would give us some flexibility. Because sometimes even though you propose an idea, they (the management) may not listen."* (Mr S, Guangzhou)

> *"I know what they (Chinese employees) think. I'm Chinese too. They think he (manager, American) is the boss, they should not say things straightforwardly to him. It would be impolite and might embarrass him. Of course, some are afraid that they might offend him. So they suggest in a very subtle way and hope that he would get it...."* (Ms Y, Guangzhou)

The interviewee, Ms Y, admitted that expatriates, like her American manager, might find it difficult to understand the real meaning when locals are so subtle in expressing their ideas. She also said that her manager was surprised when he later found out what his local employees really thought and asked Ms Y why the locals did not express their ideas directly. It seems that Chinese employees' subtlety could cause problems in their communication with expatriates. In fact, it might explain why some expatriates found that locals were unwilling to give opinions or question things (Wilkinson et al., 2005). Knowing that Chinese employees tend to be subtle in their communication, the management might need to be more sensitive to their employees' subtle way of expressing ideas and to encourage their employees to express their ideas in a slightly frank and direct manner.

While the interviewees were careful not to embarrass their managers in public and avoided damaging their manager's face, they remarked that some expatriates were not aware of the importance of face-saving to Chinese when they handled their subordinates, and they jeopardized their harmonious relationship with their subordinates.

> *"They (managers) think it's OK to point out their subordinates' mistakes in front of their colleagues, but Chinese employees will see this as an open 'accusation'! It will embarrass them ... So, they (Chinese employees) don't want to talk to them (managers). They (managers) should talk to them (their subordinates) one-to-one in private. Giving them (Chinese subordinates) face can help build up their relationship."* (Ms T, Guangzhou)

After trying their best to get their managers to understand their ideas, if the interviewees still could not convince their managers, what would they do? Some said that they would respect the final decision made by their managers.

> *"Listen to the boss (American), follow his instructions, then you won't have any problems."* (Mr I, Beijing)

> *"I would listen to him (the manager, American), because he is more experienced. Maybe my ideas are just not mature enough."* (Ms O, Beijing)

> *"If he (the manager, British) insists, there's nothing that I can do. Because after all, he is the boss! I will respect his decision."* (Ms R, Guangzhou)

To maintain a harmonious relationship with their managers, the interviewees would 'suppress' their ideas and choose to follow their managers' decision when they could not convince their managers. They believed if they insisted on their ideas, they would have conflicts with their managers.

While some interviewees chose to surrender their ideas and followed their managers' idea, a few interviewees chose to "*yang feng yin wei*" (comply in public but oppose in private). They perceived that on one hand they needed to show respect and give face to their managers by not openly defying managers' instructions; on the other hand, they had to insist on doing the things that they believed to be right. To a certain extent, they also handled the situation in a non-confrontational manner. One of the interviewees explained why he would adopt such a way to handle the disagreement with his manager:

"It (the way to handle the situation) is like the Chinese proverb 'yang feng yin wei.' Because he (the manager, French) says so, I have to follow [the manager's instructions]. But your (the manager's) way is so inflexible and it won't work... What matters is the result! As long as I can deliver the result that you (he) want(s), that should be OK." (Mr F, Beijing)

After the interviewee had attempted to convince his manager without success, he chose to go against his manager's instructions quietly instead of disobeying his manager openly.

While Mr F chose to oppose his manager's decision in private, Mr K, another interviewee, did not hide his disagreement. He said he would seek the help from the senior management if he believed the problem was too serious to be ignored.

"For key problems, like a big problem that affects the company's future, [I] will seek help from a more senior manager by asking him to handle the situation (the disagreement between the interviewee and his manager)." (Mr K, Beijing)

Although most interviewees did not insist on their ideas, they were still concerned that if their managers failed to consider their suggestions, it would create a possible deterrent to the success of the company. They believed locals know the custom of the host country better than expatriates.

"He (the expatriate) has only been here (China) for a short period of time, he doesn't know China, [or] Chinese culture... He may have heard people talking about the Chinese market, and he thinks what he has heard is completely correct... In fact, the Chinese market may be a total different story." (Mr D, Beijing)

"How to deal with Chinese... local people? He (the manager, French) wouldn't know this kind of [interpersonal] skills... he doesn't know the local custom better than we do." (Mr F, Beijing)

These interviewees suggested that many disagreements were actually caused by managers' limited knowledge of the Chinese market.

"The difficulties in communication could be caused... for example, he (the manager) may not be able to truly appreciate what is happening in the [Chinese] market, because there is cultural distance... As locals, we understand [the Chinese market] better than they (expatriates) do. Sometimes, westerners oversimplify the cultural differences thinking that there is a principle that 'fang zhu si hai er jie zhun' (is universally applicable)." (Mr H, Beijing)

"We're doing business in the Chinese market...but sometimes they (the expatriates in his organisation) don't really understand the market. ... As Chinese, very often

our understanding of the market is better than theirs... When they insist on their ideas... but we clearly know that the ideas won't work, that could be a source of conflict. " (Mr J, Beijing)

In their view, if expatriates understood the Chinese market more or were more willing to listen to locals' views, possible conflicts could be avoided.

When the interviewees perceived that their relationship with the manager was not a harmonious one, how were the interviewees affected? Many interviewees claimed that if the workplace was not harmonious, their performance would be affected.

"After having several conflicts with them (her manager and her colleague), all of a sudden, I felt loss... felt so sad. I just couldn't concentrate on my work." (Ms A, Beijing)

"When the harmonious relationship was destroyed (because the interviewee had a conflict with his boss), I just wouldn't work overtime any more. Once the office hours end, I would leave; [I] won't stay behind." (Mr C, Beijing)

Since harmony was perceived as important, some interviewees advocated that it should be the responsibility of managers to ensure that the workplace is harmonious.

"As a team leader, I think it's my responsibility to create a harmonious atmosphere for the members, allowing them to work in a friendly environment. So far, I'm quite satisfied with it (the working environment). I will listen to their ideas. If they (the ideas) are good, I will accept." (Mr M, Beijing)

The interviewees said that they would appreciate those managers who are willing to listen to and talk to them about their ideas. They also believed that communication nurtures understanding.

"Sometimes, both sides have a point. Only because they don't understand each other's work, perceptions... so [they should] have more communication." (Mr S, Guangzhou)

These interviewees trusted that more communication between managers and local employees would help create a harmonious working environment. As they believed that when there is more communication, there are more opportunities for both parties to get to know each other's perceptions. This would increase the understanding between the two parties, and thus may enhance the relationship between them. However, one may suspect if Chinese employees remain being very subtle in expressing their ideas, simply having more communication might not help. As if the communication attitude is not changed, the situatin might not change; the expatriates might still not be able to uncover the hidden meaning conveyed by the locals.

5.2.1.2 *"Expatriates have no respect for us."*

The issue of respect was brought up by slightly more than half of the interviewees (53.8%) in the discussion on how they handled their differences with their managers. It seems that female interviewees showed more interest in this issue than male interviewees did.

As shown before, while the interviewees were not reluctant in expressing their ideas, some would not insist on their views. These interviewees said that they would respect the final decision made by their managers.

> *"I think Chinese, in the end, will respect the decision made by the boss. After all, he is the boss; you have to listen to him."* (Mr G, Beijing)

In fact, not confronting their managers in public is also a way for the interviewees to show their respect to their managers. This suggests that most interviewees had respect for authority.

While the interviewees said that they would respect their managers, they also wanted to see their managers show respect to them. The respect that the interviewees expected from their managers is not the same type of respect that they gave to their managers. The respect they showed to their managers was associated with the position these managers were in the workplace. As these managers were in the position of authority, the employees perceived that they had the obligation to show respect to the managers. As for the respect that employees wanted their managers to show to them, it has nothing to do with authority; rather, it is the respect one person should show to another person. The interviewees wanted to be respected by their supervisors regarding them as valued.

Contrary to what they wished to have, some interviewees said that their managers treated them in a supercilious way.

> *"They (managers) thought their ranks are higher, so there's no need for them to understand their subordinates' work nor what their need is. They just don't care about what they (the subordinates) need."* (Ms R, Guangzhou)

> *"My boss isn't like that (treating them in a respectful way like her former manager did)... To a certain extent, we feel hurt. ... He is not very polite to us. You can see this very clearly from his emails. He always writes in a very rude way commanding us to do this and to do that... You (He) got to be polite even to your (his) subordinates... this is basic politeness. So in these little things, you (I) feel bad, you (I) feel hurt. I just feel that I 'mei mianzi' (have lost my face)."* (Ms A, Beijing)

Ms A associated respect with face. Because her boss did not respect her, she felt that she had lost face. Some interviewees commented that expatriates may not realise how important face is to Chinese. An incident Mr W spoke about is a good example to demonstrate this. Mr W worked in a European MNC, which was a business partner of another MNC, Company A, in Guangzhou. He and his colleagues, locals and expatriates, visited Company A once in a while for business. Occasionally, they had lunch in the staff canteen of Company A. After a period of time, the management of Company A decided that they could not have lunch in the staff canteen any longer. This decision caused bad feelings in him and his Chinese colleagues. However, his manager and colleagues did not understand why the Chinese were so upset, and considered that they had overreacted.

> *"It's not the free lunch we want. How much does it cost? Only a few dollars. ...They (the expatriate management of both companies) just don't get it.... It's the face issue we are concerned about!"* (Mr W, Guangzhou)

Mr W and his Chinese colleagues felt that the management of that Company A did not 'give' them *mianzi* (face) when the management refused to respect and honour him and his colleagues by treating them as *zi ji ren* (one of their own) and allowing them to have lunch in the staff canteen. He commented that it would be easier for a Chinese manager to recognise their concern.

Not only did the interviewees feel a loss of face when they were treated in a disrespectful way by their managers, the interviewees also felt frustrated and were de-motivated. They were not willing to work hard or pay extra effort in their work.

> *"Before... when we felt respected, even when we were not asked to work overtime, we would do it anyway... we put our whole heart into our work... we didn't mind there's no extra pay... we wanted to do it... But now... why would we do that? He (the new manager, Swedish) is so mean to you (us). So, you (we) just leave the office right after office hours... Since you (we) have to finish all the assignments within the office hours, you (we) have no choice but to sacrifice quality."* (Mr C, Beijing)

> *"You need to respect your subordinate... only when you respect him, he will be willing to work for you. There are a lot of opportunities in China... he does not have to work for you.... If you don't respect him, he may just leave and work for somebody else, then you may lose many employees."* (Ms X, Guangzhou)

Many interviewees perceived that disrespect was not just shown by a manager to his or her local subordinates, but more frequently by an expatriate to a local regardless of their rank. Although the interviewees said they would show respect to expatriates, they claimed that they did not gain equal respect from expatriates. This upset the interviewees greatly, as they opined that since expatriates are working in China, they should show respect to the people and the culture of the host country.

> *"[The expatriate] acts as if he is the king! He doesn't have a high opinion of Chinese... In fact, he despises you (Chinese)."* (Ms Q, Beijing)

> *"Expatriates always think that they are better. He (the expatriate) is from overseas; we are locals...so he thinks he is on the top of the world."* (Ms X, Guangzhou)

> *"The expatriate just doesn't take Chinese people seriously; he turns his nose up at you (Chinese). But if you (expatriates) want to do well in China, you need to treat people with dignity. ... I just hate that he (the expatriate) can't treat you with equal respect."* (Mr W, Guangzhou)

Some interviewees declared that it is an enjoyment to work with people who respect them. However, they believed that when there is a lack of respect from expatriates to locals, it would give rise to dissatisfaction and that could be another source of conflict. In fact, some interviewees clearly expressed their dissatisfaction in the interviews.

> *"Many Chinese are now extremely displeased and dissatisfied... You are American, so what?"* (Ms Q, Beijing)

> *"They (expatriates) already have a very high pay... I don't think they are anything special... for some, I won't even consider hiring them to work under me... They come to our place, and they don't respect us? If they don't respect Chinese, ask them to get lost.'* (Mr W, Guangzhou)

How did the interviewees react when facing the disdain from expatriates? The interviewees viewed that there are various ways to handle this. Some interviewees emphasised the importance of self-respect. If they do not have self-respect, they will not be respected.

> *"[We] need to have self-respect and don't belittle ourselves. If not, expatriates may intimidate you (us)."* (Ms E, Beijing)

Some interviewees viewed that respect could only be earned and when they are strong or powerful enough, people would respect them. They believed expatriates probably regarded China or Chinese as weak and inferior, which was the reason why expatriates did not show respect to Chinese.

> *"Some expatriates look down upon Chinese, but things are changing now. In fact, when the national power of China is strong enough, they (expatriates) won't be able to look down upon us... then, Chinese can really enjoy equal status as expatriates."* (Mr W, Guangzhou)

While some perceived that self-improvement was the answer for the problem of expatriates' disrespectful behaviour or attitude towards Chinese, a few interviewees suggested that they might strike back when they were treated in a disrespectful way. When they perceived that they were pushed over the edge by their manager, they might withdraw the respect for authority and confront the manager, even in public. An interviewee, Ms Q, shared the experience that her friend, Ms OA, had with her friend's manager. Ms OA worked in an MNC in Beijing. Her manager was in a habit of giving instructions in a commanding manner. When Ms OA perceived that the manager went too far making unreasonable requests and showing no respect to her, she pushed back and said to him, "You may be my boss, but don't forget that you are in China!"

In fact, an incident[15] reported in a number of Chinese newspapers (e.g. *Beijing Youth News*, *China Daily* and *IT Time*) in April 2006 gave an account of how a local secretary 'fought back' when she perceived she was disrespected by her manager, who 'damaged' her face in a brutal way. The secretary gained support from many people who knew of the incident, and was regarded as a heroine for doing what they could not do. The comments from the readers showed that they were filled with admiration for her courage and felt exulted at the secretary's 'victory'. This may reflect a general feeling that many Chinese employees are in a similar situation and the relationship with their managers is at stake. If that actually is the case, problems related to staffing issues may become more acute in MNCs than have been reported in the literature.

5.2.2 *How would you describe a good supervisor?*

To explore further what might affect the interviewees' relationship with their manager, I attempted to find out what they expected from their supervisor by asking how they would describe a good supervisor. Two qualities were frequently mentioned by the interviewees when describing a good supervisor or advising what a manager should observe when managing locals. The two qualities are "showing care and concern" and "showing trust".

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15 The incident was about a conflict between an expatriate manager and his Chinese secretary in an MNC in Beijing. The expatriate manager returned to his office one night after office hours and found that he was locked outside his office. He did not have his key with him, but his Chinese secretary had already left. This manager attempted to contact her for hours without success. He was so furious that he sent a strongly worded e-mail to reprimand his secretary for neglecting her duties. He furnished the senior management with a copy. Thinking that the expatriate manager's accusation was not reasonable and the e-mail was written in an inappropriate manner, the secretary sent a reply e-mail to her manager responding to his accusation. In her email, she listed a number of reasons to justify why she could not accept her manager's accusation:

> *"First, what I did was correct. For security reasons, I locked the door when I left the office. I could not bear the responsibility if anything was stolen from the office. Second, you have your own key. You should not shift the blame to others when you forgot to take your own key. Third, you have no right to interfere with my private time. Please bear in mind that I work 8 hours a day; the lunch time and the evening time after work is all my private time. Fourth, since the first day that I joined the company, I have been working very hard to fulfil my duties. I have been asked to work overtime for a number of occasions, and I had no complaints. However, I will not entertain any request to work overtime for non-work-related matters. Fifth, although I am your subordinate, please pay attention to your tone. This is basic politeness needed for human relationships..."*

She furnished a copy of the reply e-mail to the whole organisation. Subsequently, her e-mail was forwarded to many other MNCs and became a hot topic of conversation. ("EMC xiao mi shu PK da lao ban", 2006; Huang, 2006; "Nu mi shu you jian dan tiao wai qi", 2006)

Findings suggest that the Guangzhou interviewees put more emphasis on "showing care and concern", while the Beijing interviewees showed more interest in the issue of trust. It also seems that female interviewees showed more interest in the issue of care and concern, while there was not much difference between two groups of interviewees in their interest in the trust issue. Although some interviewees also mentioned about the competence of managers, it seems that they were more concerned about the virtue of these managers.

5.2.2.1 *"He is a good boss because he shows care and concern to me."*

When asked how they would describe a good supervisor, the majority of the interviewees (73%) said that good supervisors show care and concern for their subordinates. What kind of care and concern did they expect from their supervisors? Many interviewees claimed that a caring boss would be concerned about their staff's work and development.

> *"A good boss would give me guidance for my work... would support me. If he thinks it's not right, I have made some mistakes, just like what I have said before, [he] will not just criticise me, but will give me advice to make improvement."* (Ms R, Guangzhou)

> *"I have a very good boss, my American boss. In my work, I need to handle a lot of overseas correspondence, documents. All these are written and sent by me. Every email that I send, he will have a look at it and advise me on what improvement is needed, like punctuation, word choice. ...He's not trying to monitor you (me) but to help you (me) improve [my] English."* (Mr D, Beijing)

Some interviewees said that good supervisors not only show concern in their work life, but also care about other aspects like their personal feelings and family. An interviewee, Mr H (Beijing), particularly admired how his American supervisor reacted after the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia was bombed by US aircraft in 1999. He said that his supervisor wrote an email to all the Chinese employees showing his concern and sympathy. He esteemed his American supervisor, regarding the supervisor as a very good boss. He even commented that his American manager did not act like other expatriates, who showed no sympathy to Chinese.

Another interviewee, Ms A, also talked about her appreciation to her expatriate supervisor for showing his care and concern to her father.

> *"When my father was hospitalised, he (her former Swedish manager) sent flowers to the hospital extending his regards... When one receives a small kindness from others, one should exert oneself to the utmost to pay the debt of gratitude. I had a very good relationship with him... In fact, I was willing to do more for him, work harder for him, just to show my gratitude."* (Ms A, Beijing)

To show her gratitude for her boss's care and concern, Ms A paid extra effort in her work. She used a Chinese proverb to describe the situation, "*di shui zhi en, yong quan xiang bao*" (When one receives a small kindness from others, one should exert oneself to the utmost to pay the debt of gratitude.). Although what her boss did was only sending flowers to the hospital to extend his regards, which could be interpreted as 'a small kindness', Ms A was grateful to the care and concern that her boss showed through this gesture and paid the debt of her gratitude by paying extra effort in her work.

These interviewees described their managers as "*you renqing wei*" (have kindness, humanity), and they would return or pay back (*bao*) their manager's kindness by working harder.

While some interviewees were grateful because their expatriate supervisors were 'generous' in showing their kindness, others had very different experiences. One of the interviewees, Ms P (Guangzhou), was disappointed by her American supervisor's inconsiderate behaviour. When she once got sick and was sent to hospital, her American boss didn't send her any cards or flowers to show his concern. On the contrary, the only concern he had was when she would be back to work. Another interviewee, Ms Y (Guangzhou), had a similar experience. She was requested by her American supervisor to shorten her maternity leave. Both interviewees were upset by the way their supervisors treated them. The first interviewee left the company one year after the incident. She claimed that the incident made her realise there was no *renqing wei* (kindness, humanity) in her company; therefore, it was not a place for her to stay and she would be better off if she switched to another company which cares about its staff.

In fact, many interviewees said that they respected those supervisors who had *renqing wei*. Many saw that having a supervisor who showed care and concern is, in fact, a source for their satisfaction.

> *"No matter [whether] it's about our work or our life, he (the manager) shows care and concern. This is particularly encouraging for young people... I'm happy here and don't want to leave, because we have a very good boss."* (Mr K, Beijing)

> *"When your boss and company show care and concern, you feel satisfied and secured. I don't know many other cultures, but I believe the feeling of security is very important to Chinese."* (Mr B, Beijing)

Some interviewees attributed the tendency that managers were not used to showing care and concern to the western management style. They viewed the western management style as being rational and results-oriented, whereas the Chinese management style was people-oriented emphasising *renqing* (humanity). Therefore, managers focused more on the work and the result; whereas local managers emphasised more on people.

> *"People there (the SOE that she worked in before) had renqing wei.... Here (the MNC she worked in)? Business is business. ...No one cares. They won't even say a kind word."* (Ms A, Beijing)

Many interviewees did not like the rational and result-oriented management style and suggested the management style emphasising *renqing* was more appropriate for managing Chinese employees.

> *"Besides work, Chinese are also concerned about affection between people... I have no problem in working with my manager, but ... I think there is a lack of affection."* (Mr F, Beijing)

> *"In America, they have many books or materials on management... I have read some of them, and they are well-written. But, using those ideas here in China? They are not very useful, because China has its own national conditions; we have our unique culture (that emphasises human relations)."* (Mr J, Beijing)

> *"They (managers) just look at the result. If you have nothing to deliver, you need to leave immediately. But Chinese managers are not like that. At least, they will give [the employee] a chance."* (Ms R, Guangzhou)

"He (her manager) is too results-oriented. He doesn't really care about you... He doesn't ask too much, but at the same time gives no support. If [you] can't meet the target, he will blame you." (Ms V, Guangzhou)

These interviewees suggested that MNCs and managers should adjust their management style to show more concern to their Chinese employees, as that would have a positive impact on employees' morale.

"It won't require too much money. [The company] just needs to, say, throw a small birthday party to the employees... a birthday cake, or even a card will do. Just show some concern. The employees would appreciate that." (Ms U, Guangzhou)

"Show more concern... more 'renqing wei'. This is much better than giving bonus. [Employees] Will work voluntarily...but expatriates don't quite understand this." (Ms T, Guangzhou)

The interviewees did not doubt expatriates' capability or sincerity of showing concern, but they only thought that the concern that expatriates showed was not enough. It seems that they expected the expatriates to get themselves involved more; on top of offering comforting words or small gestures of kindness, they wanted to see actual actions taken by the expatriates to help.

"If a coworker got sick or has family crisis, expatriates would show their sympathy extending their regards to that person as well. That's it. They won't go any further. But Chinese would ask more and find out what the person needs and what help could be offered. (They) Will go all the way to help." (Mr B, Beijing)

Nevertheless, a few interviewees commented that Chinese sometimes were too helpful. Some Chinese might get themselves involved too much in others' business and not be able to respect others' privacy when trying to provide help.

"Americans regard privacy as important and Chinese should respect them. If they do not want others to share their burden, we should respect that and should not insist on helping them." (Mr C, Beijing)

It seems that the findings suggest the difference between the Chinese view and expatriates' view in this area lies in the degree of care and concern that should be shown to others in the workplace. The solution perhaps is to strike a balance between privacy and sympathy.

5.2.2.2 *"There are some trust issues here."*

Other than showing care and concern, many interviewees (65.4%) also believed a good manager should show trust to his or her subordinates. The interviewees described the trust from the manager as a driving force for their working hard, which they also regarded as a source of their self-confidence and satisfaction.

> *"He (the interviewee's former manager) particularly trusted me and gave me a free hand in my work. His trust was a motivation to me. At that time, I was still new to the job, I didn't even know how to answer phones in a professional manner... but because of his trust, I was doing better and better. He never questioned about my work. He knew that when he delegated the work to me, I would finish it to his satisfaction. He puts his trust in you (me) and that would drive you (me) to try your (my) best in doing a good job. You know, when people trust you first, you then need to do the job well."* (Ms A, Beijing)

> *"The trust from my manager makes me feel just 'yu ru de shui' (like a fish in water— feel that I am in my element) and I could achieve [my] full potential in such an environment."* (Mr F, Beijing)

> *"I felt satisfied when my boss listened to my ideas and let me participate in the decision making."* (Mr Z, Guangzhou)

In the discussion on how the manager could show trust to his or her subordinates, some interviewees suggested that when their manager delegates work and responsibilities to them, and empower them with the corresponding authority to complete the work and responsibilities assigned, subordinates would recognise the trust from their manager. The interviewees declared that if a supervisor trusts his or her subordinate, the supervisor would delegate work to the subordinate and empower the subordinate to make decisions.

> *"Many Chinese now expect to see their managers to delegate work and responsibilities to them rather than instruct them what they need to do! When [the employees are] inexperienced, the boss has a duty to guide them, but when they are now experienced, [the boss] should let them do their work, and shouldn't monitor too much."* (Ms R, Guangzhou)

> *"He (the manager) would give me the authority to make decisions... that is trust!"* (Ms T, Guangzhou)

> *"Definitely, [I] like delegation. If the boss lets you make the decision, it means he trusts you a great deal. ... But sometimes, he (manager) delegates work but not authority, he doesn't completely give you a free hand, he always tells you: I want this, I want that. You have a strong feeling: why can't he trust [me]? I'm quite capable of doing these things."* (Mr B, Beijing)

"In fact, if only the title is given but not the authority, that's meaningless... that isn't trust." (Mr C, Beijing)

While these interviewees emphasised the importance of their managers to delegate responsibilities and empower them with authority to complete their work assigned, they still regarded support, for example, in a form of advice, from their managers as crucial for doing the work delegated to them. However, they would appreciate it if their managers allowed them room to do their work instead of closely monitoring their work.

"When the boss lets you do your job without closely monitoring you, you feel more relaxed. Without pressure, you could do your work better." (Mr J, Beijing)

"We only need to send (him) an email a day [briefing him on what has happened in the office]. He gives me a lot of room for doing my work, as long as I keep the company interests in mind when doing my work. When my boss trusts me like that, I can have room to exert my talent." (Mr N, Beijing)

When their managers monitored their work closely, they interpreted this kind of behaviour as distrust.

"I didn't like that when he (the interviewee's French manager) interferes too much. That means he doesn't trust me! I really appreciate if you (he) could just tell me what kind of result you (he) want(s) to achieve and just let(s) me try it, allow me to do it on my own and I would do it well." (Mr F, Beijing)

"... those follow-ups, testing your work... this is a bit sensitive... [I] just don't know what his (her manager's) real motive [is] of checking your (my) work. [I] just feel that there is no trust." (Ms T, Guangzhou)

At the organisational level, some interviewees also perceived that there was no trust from the MNCs they worked with as there was limited opportunity for them to be promoted to top management.

"... doesn't have enough trust in the Chinese managers... They (The MNC) won't allow you, a local, to be in power... to be a decision maker, that's no way..." (Ms Q, Beijing)

"...very unlikely that local managers can be promoted to the top management... they (MNCs) don't trust locals..." (Ms T, Guangzhou)

Some interviewees described their frustration with their managers for questioning their ability and not trusting them.

"If I am capable of doing my job well, why can't you (he) (the manager, British) just give me a free hand in my work? But he just wouldn't!" (Ms P, Beijing)

"I feel that he (the interviewee's Swedish manager) doesn't trust you (me) when he assigns work to you (me). You (I) don't feel good about that... I think that's why I couldn't do the job well... I spent a whole month drawing a comprehensive plan for him, but he just put it aside and didn't use it at all. I felt hurt... You (I) asked [myself]: why did you do this to me?" (Ms A, Beijing)

When asked what they would do to handle their frustration, some said that they were so frustrated that they would just give up and lower their expectation of their managers; they would not expect their manager to be able to recognise their ability. Some said that they were so disappointed that they planned to leave the company. There is Chinese proverb that might describe how they feel: "*ai mo day yu xin si*" (Nothing is more lamentable than a dead heart—the greatest sorrow is despair.) These interviewees sounded that they felt being let down by the situation when they made the comment in the interviews. The findings suggest that trust from their managers could be important to locals. When managers do not trust their local subordinates, negative impacts might result, for example, it might have some impact on their morale. If that is the case, the management needs to consider how this could be handled.

One interviewee, however, adopted a different mechanism to overcome the anxiety brought by the distrust from the management. He chose to feign compliance to avoid public confrontation.

"If he (the interviewee's French manager) doesn't give me a free hand in my work, and he insists that I follow his way, then I would comply with his decision in public, but oppose it in private. I would just do it my way. What matters is the result! As long as I could deliver the result that he wants, things will be fine." (Mr F, Beijing)

While the public confrontation was avoided, it seems that since the conflicts went unresolved and they might continue to simmer under the surface until they explode. This might cause human resources problems to the management.

5.3 Working in MNCs

The questions in this area "working in MNCs" and the area on "practice of the organisation" attempted to answer the second part of the key research question: How Chinese employees make sense of their work life in MNCs.

Four interview questions were designed in this area to find out their expectation on working in MNCs.

5.3.1 *What was it that attracted you to work in an MNC?*

In the discussion on their reasons for working in an MNC, some interviewees gave explanations like "the employment in MNCs is associated with high prestige" and "higher salary is offered in MNCs".

> *"... an MNC has a higher prestige...is very good...when your friends and family know that I (you) work in a prestigious company, you will feel good about it."* (Mr L, Beijing)

> *"Higher salary was the reason. It's important because it proves your value."* (Mr M, Beijing)

> *"What employees care the most about is salary.... In general, the salary offered in MNCs is higher than that offered in SOEs."* (Ms R, Guangzhou)

However, the two mostly cited reasons were related to "development" and "fairness".

5.3.1.1 *"I want to seek development."*

Although some interviewees admitted the salary packages offered by MNCs were very attractive, they claimed that salary was not the only consideration that they had when they decided to work in an MNC. Some claimed that after they had worked for some years, remuneration became less important in the decision when they took the job offer; there were other more important decision factors.

> *"Back 14 or 15 years ago, I joined a joint venture. At that time, you were (I was) very young, what you (I) valued the most was the salary package... But now, you (I)*

will still consider the salary package, but not as important as before, [I] would definitely consider development opportunities, like promotion, more." (Mr D, Beijing)

"Eight years ago, I didn't earn much. Because I wanted to earn a bit more, I switched to an MNC. But now, to me, salary is only secondary." (Mr H, Beijing)

As a matter of fact, 24 out of 26 interviewees (92.3%) said that the major reason why they were attracted to MNCs was that MNCs provided a lot of development opportunities. Findings suggest that most interviewees valued development opportunities and no big difference was found among the groups.

"MNCs consider their staff as the company's most valuable resources. They take great interest in training and developing their staff." (Mr L, Beijing)

"It (MNC) really... I really think that it knows how to develop its people... it really puts a strong emphasis on training opportunities for its staff." (Ms O, Beijing)

"MNCs value human resources development more [than SOEs] and offer you more training opportunities." (Ms T, Guangzhou)

What kinds of development opportunities did these interviewees expected from MNCs? It could be divided into three main types: opportunities to learn new things (e.g. western business practices), chances to exert their talent, and advancement (i.e. promotion) opportunities.

"I wanted to seek advancement; I didn't want to stay in the same place year after year... I wanted to learn new things... and then I saw the recruitment advertisement (of the first MNC she worked with), so I sent out my CV..." (Ms Q, Beijing)

"Whether it (the MNC) offers [you] enough chances for developing [your] ability; this is definitely one of the considerations. ...Working here is rather meaningful... There is so much joy brought by the success and so many things to learn." (Mr F, Beijing)

"We all want to find a good job...salary is not the only consideration. ...(I) also look for opportunities to help me grow to my full potential." (Ms A, Beijing)

"It's everyone's wish to take up more challenging jobs (refers to promotion)... to wish to develop oneself through these challenges." (Mr K, Beijing)

"Of course, I want to have development. You know, moving up the ladder, not always staying in the same post." (Ms R, Guangzhou)

The interviewees valued development opportunities. Some interviewees even said that they did not mind giving up part of their salary in exchange for more development opportunities. When talking about her future plan, Ms Q (Beijing) said that she would prefer her company to give her a chance to work in the company's subsidiary in another country rather than getting a higher salary. She believed that would allow her to have a better career development.

A similar attitude from local employees was observed by Ms OB[16], a Singaporean manager, interviewed in Beijing. She described the eagerness shown by her Chinese subordinates in seeking development:

> *"They are really hungry for knowledge... [they] really want to gain more experience by working in a foreign company. Some even don't mind taking up more tasks... even without pay. For them, development is more important than salary."* (Ms OB)

Why were these interviewees so eager to learn new things? Some interviewees believed a good employee would value lifelong learning as it is for their betterment.

> *"If you don't keep on learning, soon you would lose your [ability to be] proactive...if you are not good enough, you will soon be replaced... you would lose your competition ability."* (Ms K, Beijing)

> *"If you keep improving your professional knowledge or management skills, you will have a better future."* (Ms U, Guangzhou)

The interviewees also associated development opportunities with their job satisfaction. Some claimed that they were satisfied with their job as they got a lot of chances to learn new things, whereas some pointed out that not having development in the workplace was their main dissatisfaction with their job.

> *"I like my job very much as it's very meaningful; there are many things to learn on the job."* (Mr F, Beijing)

> *"I don't feel particularly satisfied. Why? Because people always wish to have constant development. I'm not just talking about promotion in the job... It could be new or challenging work tasks..."* (Ms A, Beijing)

16 Ms OB was in her early 30s when she was interviewed in 2004. She worked as a manager in an MNC in Beijing before the interview. She started her own business in China after leaving the company.

"In fact, employees also want to have long-term development... but [the management] hasn't discussed with me about my long-term development... career path..., which I'm not happy about." (Ms T, Guangzhou)

The interview data reveal an interesting finding. Many interviewees not only wanted to have development opportunities in their work, but also wished their managers to play an active role in enhancing their development. While the performance appraisal system might help the employees identify their development needs, there is no evidence shown in the literature that managers would take an active role in their employees' development; it seems that the Chinese employees' expectation might be different from what was practiced in the organisation.

"He (the manager, British) will not simply criticise you (me) saying that you're (I'm) not capable of doing this, or doing that. Just the opposite, he will first point out to you (me) that you're (I'm) not competent in a certain area. Then he will tell you (me) what improvement is needed in that area and how to make the improvement... You (I) feel good about this." (Ms P, Beijing)

An interviewee, Mr W (Guangzhou), shared Ms P's view that the manager's involvement in their development plan was important, but he suspected that not many managers knew how to coach their subordinates and help them develop their potential. He suggested that MNCs should give some training to equip their managers to do that.

What happened when the interviewees perceived that their company failed to provide them development opportunities or the management showed no interest in enhancing their development? The interviewees said that they would be de-motivated and de-moralised and might choose to leave for another place that shows interest in providing them opportunities for development and helping them develop.

"If this place (the company) doesn't allow you to fulfil your expectation [of having development], the only thing [you] can do is to turn [your] back and change your job." (Mr F, Beijing)

"My boss (Swedish) is the type [of person] who doesn't give you many opportunities for training or development... I feel that this environment is not suitable for me to make further progress." (Ms A, Beijing)

As a matter of fact, Ms A was so disappointed with her manager and her organisation; she left a few months after the interview and started her own business.

Not getting involved in their subordinates' development plan might also generate in the locals distrust of their managers. Some interviewees suspected that managers did not want to help locals develop because of their self-interest.

> *"Most expatriates are in their 40's... there won't be a lot of promotion opportunities waiting for you [them] back home... they won't trust locals, why would they be interested in (our) training.... "* (Ms Q, Beijing)

> *"Of course they don't want to train us...because if they return [to their own country], there are no jobs for them"* (Ms U, Guangzhou)

Some interviewees also pointed out the gap between the salary packages offered by some big POEs (privately owned enterprises) or SOEs (state owned enterprises) and those offered by MNCs had been narrowed down. Therefore, the only thing left for attracting local talented people was the advancement potential offered by the job. If they believed there were no more development chances in MNCs, they would not mind joining SOEs or POEs.

> *"As the economy in China is improving, some SOEs are doing quite well; the salary or bonus schemes offered by these SOEs are very attractive."* (Ms V, Guangzhou)

> *"In the last few years, China's economy is developing... Ten years ago, MNCs were very attractive to locals, but nowadays they are not so... of course they are still attractive, but not as attractive as before. ... I'm not sure whether you notice that. In fact, in recent years, many more senior Chinese managers in MNCs have joined POEs, perhaps it's because the effect of the 'glass ceiling'. I think it's natural for the more experienced local managers to switch from MNCs to POEs, as 'the stage' is bigger there (there is more room for locals to exert their talent)."* (Mr D, Beijing)

> *"I'm aware that there's a 'glass ceiling'... very unlikely that locals will be promoted to a very senior position, like the department head. But at the moment, I'm not worried. (Her position was rather junior.) In future, I might consider POEs."* (Ms U, Guangzhou)

The findings above show that many interviewees regarded the development opportunities that their jobs could offer as important. If they perceived that there was no or limited development opportunities, their morale might be affected. Some might even choose to leave.

For the interviewees, a good job should be the one that offers them opportunities to develop and advance themselves—on top of offering a reasonable salary. Therefore, whether there are opportunities for development in the workplace are crucial when they consider a job. The interviewees also warned that if development opportunities become scarce, they would consider joining POEs, which were perceived often provide opportunities to their staff to advance. This might explain why MNCs were not very successful in retaining their experienced employees when they merely turn to offering a competitive salary or reward package as the strategy for staff retention. This is in line with the argument put forward by Chiu et al. (2002) that people's needs and preference might change o ver time. When employees have more money, they might turn their attention to other needs. The interviewees revealed to us that need for development might be one of the candidates of these "other needs".

5.3.1.2 *"Fairness is important."*

"Fairness" was another common reason given by most interviewees (73%) for working in MNCs. Findings suggest that the Guangzhou interviewees tended to show more interest in the issue than the Beijing interviewees did; however, differences in tendency were not found between the female and the male interviewees nor between the younger and the older ones.

Those interviewees who brought up the issue of fairness claimed that they did not like the ways that SOEs managed their staff related to training and promotion, thinking that unfair treatments were adopted.

"I really don't like the ways that the supervisors in SOEs manage their staff... they are so unfair and unjust... the opportunities for training will only be given to those who have good relationship with them (supervisors), you know, the members of their in-groups." (Mr C, Beijing)

"I don't like the ways they (SOEs) handle [staff issues], that is... whether you have connections [is very important]. Your personal capability or skills or experience are of course important, but these are not the key to your success." (Mr Z, Guangzhou)

In contrast, the interviewees perceived that MNCs were fair, at least fairer than SOEs and POEs, in handling staff issues.

"I like MNCs, their management style is impartial." (Mr H, Beijing)

"The manager will not consider your personal relationship with him. If there is a growth in the business, he will give you the bonus. He will only base [it] on your performance when he does the evaluation." (Ms V, Guangzhou)

Owing to the expectation of being treated fairly in MNCs, these interviewees all had a strong wish to see justice exercised by their companies and supervisors.

"He (the manager) should be fair and just when handling staff issues. It's his responsibility to maintain fairness in the workplace." (Mr W, Guangzhou)

"It's important to manage in a fair way. If there is no fairness [in the workplace], they (locals) will leave when there is a better offer in other companies." (Mr J, Beijing)

"He (the manager) could not solve this (the conflict that Ms A had with one of her colleagues) and he just pushed it to the HR... In the end, it was left unsettled... I really think that's unjust... especially when this was actually caused by his unclear instructions in work duties and assignments in the first place." (Ms A, Beijing)

Mr B (Beijing), one of the interviewees, as a manager himself also emphasised the importance of fairness in assigning work tasks to subordinates considering their workload. He believed only when a manager is impartial in handling staff issues could he then keep his subordinates satisfied.

Despite the interviewees' initial high expectation of MNCs' and their managers' fairness in handling staff issues, some were disappointed. They perceived that "different treatment" was the predominant evidence to prove that fairness was not always practised in their organisations or by their managers. This might lead the Chinese employees to question the company policy. They might suspect that *chong wai you bie* (locals and expatriates are treated differently) and they were regarded as outgroup members.

> *"Some MNCs protect and take special care of their own (the expatriates from the home country)... I have this strong feeling."* (Ms U, Guangzhou)

> *"Your (expatriates') package is much better than mine, this already upsets the locals. Besides, I believe many locals are extremely outstanding... If the expatriates can [do the managerial tasks well], so can they (the locals)! But they are not given the chance."* (Ms Q, Beijing)

> *"I'm very dissatisfied with the management... different treatments of locals and expatriates in pay and promotion. For the same post, only because you are an expatriate and I am Chinese, then our salary packages are very different. ... When there is a promotion opportunity, the company (the MNC the interviewee worked with) will consider an inexperienced expatriate but not a local employee who has worked in a similar area for many years. Maybe they (the expatriate management) believe the expatriate can communicate better with the management. But to Chinese employees, it's unfair."* (Mr F, Beijing)

Another area in which some interviewees felt they were unfairly treated was the promotion opportunities. Many of them perceived that there was a 'glass ceiling' in the career ladder in their MNCs. (This theme was also mentioned in Section 5.3.1.1.)

> *"Even when local employees have the ability to hold a more senior managerial position, their companies may not have the plan to localize their top management..."* (Mr D, Beijing)

> *"Obviously, there's a 'glass ceiling'... you can basically see which position you will be able to achieve in ten years' time, and that's it. After that, that's no way that you can make a breakthrough..."* (Ms X, Guangzhou)

The interviewees expressed that by the time they reached that point, they would simply leave the company. In fact, one interviewee, Mr Z (Guangzhou), left the MNC he had worked with and started his own business because he believed that he would not be considered for any further promotion. This might suggest a potential retention problem to the organisation.

A few interviewees, however, disagreed with this view claiming that the so-called 'glass ceiling' is only caused by the incapability of the employee.

"I don't think there is a 'glass ceiling'. ...You are not promoted only because you don't have the ability or you're not ready for it (promotion)." (Mr G, Beijing)

"I don't see there is a 'glass ceiling' in MNCs... They (Chinese employees) are not promoted only because their ability and knowledge are not yet up to the required standard." (Mr W, Guangzhou)

If unfairness, like the 'glass ceiling', is perceived and does not really exist, then what could MNCs do to show their fairness? A few interviewees suggested that making company policy transparent would help the company show its fairness.

"It's not clear why that particular person is promoted. Is it because of her performance? Or she has a personal relationship with the boss? ...The boss should make it clear what the promotion criteria are. ...there's a lot of guessing." (Ms R, Guangzhou)

"The management should inform the employees of the company's plans [for localization]. They (the employees) know that many things can't be done overnight, but at least the management can show to the employees the company has plans and the management is working on it." (Ms Y, Guangzhou)

The findings above show that many interviewees regarded fairness as important and they expected to see it practised in MNCs. However, many of them were not completely satisfied with the situation in their organisations and suspected that their organisations or managers were not fair in handling staff issues. The perceived favouritism in the expatriate management (hereafter management) could be one of the causes for the contradictions between locals and expatriates.

5.4 Practice of the organisation

The questions in this area of interest further explored the research subject's work life in MNCs. In this area, three interview questions were designed to find out how the interviewees perceived their organisation's practice; whether they were contented with it or not.

5.4.1 *How do you feel about working in this MNC?*

The interviewees in general were satisfied with the practice of their organisation. When asked what they liked the most about the practice of their organisation, many interviewees (69%) replied that it was the "less complicated human relationship" that they liked the most. The findings also suggest that older interviewees inclined to value "less complicated human relationship" more than younger interviewees.

5.4.1.1 *"Human relationship is less complicated here."*

The interviewees were particularly attracted to the less complicated human relationships in the MNCs because they found the comparatively complicated human relationships in SOEs troublesome. It seems that there is a paradox here: on the one hand, human relations is regarded as an important motivator for employee work performance (e.g. Dahlgaard, 2003; Mizuno et al., 2006); on the other hand, the interviewees were not satisfied with the human relationships in SOEs considering that these relationships were very complicated and affected their work. Their dissatisfaction was caused by a number of practices found in SOEs. Other than the unfairness in handling staff issues like training and promotion (which was discussed in Section 5.3.1.2), the interviewees also had other criticisms.

> *"Sometimes, Chinese cannot separate the private from public aspects. Their personal relationships interfere with their work... The boundary between the two is very blurred. In SOEs, if you have good personal relationships with others, you gain a lot of conveniences... if you don't have good personal relationships, you might encounter a lot of hurdles. This has nothing to do with your ability."* (Mr F, Beijing)

> *"I don't like the complicated relationships in SOEs. To have good relationships... one thing is very common in SOEs, which is to brown-nose your boss. What his style is, what he likes, ...you need to adjust yourself, change yourself (to please your boss). Doing this makes me uncomfortable."* (Ms R, Guangzhou)

> *"Chinese talk about 'guanxi' (relationships, connections). He's (They're) very sensitive to people... he has (they have) all these 'xiao quanzi' (in-groups). These 'xiao quanzi' fight against each other for self-interest. There may be office politics in MNCs, but not as serious as this (the situation in SOEs)."* (Mr S, Guangzhou)

"I don't like it... you need to 'la guanxi' (pull some relationships), sometimes you need to lick somebody's shoes to get things done, I just don't like it. You get very tired to handle all such stuff." (Ms U, Guangzhou)

Many interviewees were tired of the situation that in-groups in SOEs only sought self-interest, and in some cases it might jeopardise the organisation's interest when doing so. They said that they would prefer to work in MNCs because they perceived that the foreign cultures were comparatively simple and straight-forward. Therefore, they could focus on their work tasks and would not need to spend too much time on dealing with people.

"Getting on well with each other is not easy. Perhaps it's even more difficult for Chinese. Chinese rely on guanxi to get things done and that complicates the relations. On the other hand, expatriates believe in system... so comparatively, it's easier to handle." (Ms X, Guangzhou)

"Here (the MNCs the interviewee worked in), business is business. Working with expatriates, the only thing you need to be concerned about is work... you don't need to worry about your personal relationship with them. ...Yes, you get along well with them, but you don't need to talk something personal [with them]." (Mr F, Beijing)

"In MNCs, human relationships are much simpler. For example, I don't need to spend time on handling things between people. ... Unlike in SOEs, you need to establish your connections making sure you have a wide 'guanxi wang' (network). If you don't have good connections, you could encounter a lot of hurdles." (Mr H, Beijing)

While some interviewees got tired of the possible troubles caused by the complicated human relationships in the workplace, they admitted that *guanxi* (relationships, connections) is very important to Chinese. In the West, having connection is also important in the business world, but it is unlikely a sufficient condition to get business; perhaps more importantly individuals need to demonstrate their competence in order to get business. In China, *guanxi* seems to have a greater influence on the success of the business. Having ability sometimes is not sufficient to get business; individuals may also need good *ren mai* (social network).

"Expatriates would consider whether you are competent to do it, but Chinese are different. They will look at the 'guanxi' first. In every aspect, 'guanxi' is really a kind of resource. With 'guanxi', you can get things done and others simply cannot." (Ms Q, Beijing)

"If you have a good relationship with me, your wife has a good relationship with me, my wife also has a good relationship with your wife, then we will trust each other more. When you two have a good relationship, things can be handled easily." (Mr B, Beijing)

"He (The manager) knows what 'guanxi' is, he understands our culture, so his management is quite good." (Mr N, Beijing)

The interviewees believed that many expatriates were aware of the importance of *guanxi*; however, they might find it difficult to handle, especially when they did not fully appreciate the notion. Some expatriates may misinterpret *guanxi* as a practice of bribery (Kidd, 2001). As Yang (2002) argued, "there is a difference between *guanxi* and corruption or bribery" (p. 465). In fact, one of the interviewees, Ms T (Guangzhou), suggested that *guanxi* is more complex than most expatriates understand. For example, when they simply regarded *guanxi* as bribery, they might overlook the effort that individuals need to pay in building up *guanxi*. This leads to another misunderstanding that expatriates might have.

Expatriates may see *guanxi* as short-term relationships and they do not need effort and time to cultivate *guanxi*.

"He (the manager, American) is a bit, I feel, too anxious to achieve success quickly. I told him that here's not America, he couldn't just walk in somebody's office and start talking about business. He has to ask around, might need to pull some strings to get an appointment. You don't get this done but want to get business? You must be crazy! He thinks that having meals, giving gifts and providing entertainment to clients would be enough to build up the relationship. He just doesn't know what 'guanxi' really means!" (Ms T, Guangzhou)

Some interviewees remarked that real *guanxi* could go beyond a person's work life and become a life-long relationship. Ms OB, the Singaporean manager interviewed in Beijing, had such experience. When she worked as a manager in an MNC, she established very good relationship with her Chinese subordinates. When she started her own business, she got a lot of help from her former Chinese subordinates.

"Before I left the company, they (her Chinese subordinates) told me if I had any difficulties when establishing my own business and needed help, I could call them and they would see how they could help me. They said, 'I will see whether my husband can give you a helping hand.' or 'I will call my friends and they have

> *good connections.' Once they offer you their friendship, they would go all the way to help you."* (Ms OB)

Because of the help from one of her Chinese subordinates, she was able to get a manufacturer to make products for her company. The owner of the company told her that if she was not referred by a close friend of his, he would not do business with her because her company was small and he did not know her at all. Clearly, she did not have his trust because there was no relationship (*guanxi*) between them. However, because of the *guanxi* that her former subordinate had with the owner, she was able to gain his trust by making use of this *guanxi*. This suggests that *guanxi* is the basis of personal trust. This may explain why *guanxi* tends to be an essential condition for getting business in China, as *guanxi* entails trust.

Many interviewees regarded *guanxi* as a source of competitive advantage. If they had good personal relationships, they might have a better chance to be successful in getting business or their work done. However, it takes time to build up *guanxi* and needs time to maintain it.

> *"You need time to maintain your relationship. If you don't, when you ask people for a favour, they would say I (you) haven't contacted them for a long time. If I (you) ask them to do this or do that for me (you), they won't be willing to help."* (Mr J, Beijing)

> *"To cultivate 'guanxi', you can't rush. You can't just pour out to people, and expect [to build up your relationship like that]). Some might think, 'It's too much for me. I can't take it.' It's better to slow down...one step at a time."* (Mr L, Beijing)

Some interviewees also suggested that to maintain relationships, not only time is needed, but also individuals need to prove that they are reliable by delivering what they have promised. When they are able to keep their promise, given in conversation or in a form of written contracts, they would be able to show that they are trustworthy.

> *"People at the headquarters won't care what promise you have given to the customers... they don't talk about guanxi. They won't push things through for the customers, so the commitment that I have promised for the customers, I can't implement... No doubt that will damage the relationship. Next time, if you (I) talk*

to him about a big order, how would he respond? You (I) can do nothing. " (Ms T, Guangzhou)

The findings suggest that the interviewees had mixed feelings over *guanxi* because of its complexity. While they understood the importance of *guanxi* and treasured good interpersonal relationships that rest on reciprocity, they were weary of the utilitarian nature of *guanxi* aiming at exploitation. When *guanxi* got complicated, the interviewees found that the detriment brought by *guanxi* outweighs the benefit. Therefore, they preferred less complicated human relationships found in MNCs. This suggests that the notion of *guanxi* to Chinese might have been modified. At the same time, the findings also suggest that since *guanxi* is still important to the locals, MNCs may need to consider how to make of *guanxi* to help them manage their local staff.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has given an account of seven prominent themes that emerged from the interviews. In the area of the interviewees' relationship with their managers, the data reveal that "harmony" and "respect" were most valued when the interviewees had differences with the manager.

To maintain harmony, many interviewees were very diplomatic in adopting a non-confrontational attitude in handling disagreement. However, sometimes the tactful ways employed by the interviewees might entail problems, such as possible misunderstanding caused by the Chinese subtlety and human management problems caused by unresolved conflicts.

As for the theme on respect, the findings show that the interviewees demonstrated respect to authority and expected to receive respect from their expatriate managers and colleagues. However, some of them perceived that such respect was not shown by the expatriates and it was evident from the expatriates' unawareness of the importance of face-saving to Chinese. The findings suggest that the perceived disrespect from expatriates could be a source of conflict between locals and expatriates.

The interviewees opined that being a good supervisor by showing "care and concern" and "trust" to subordinates are crucial. The findings suggest that managers' care and trust have a positive impact on employee morale and work performance. Some interviewees claimed that when their managers showed them care and trust, they would return or pay back (*bao*) their managers' kindness and trust by working harder. However, some interviewees were not completely satisfied with the care and concern shown by their managers. The findings suggest that this could be caused by the difference between the locals' and expatriates' views on one's involvement when showing care and concern to others in the workplace. The findings also reveal that the local employees regarded insufficient delegation and empowerment as evidence of their managers' distrust in them; this in turn affected their job satisfaction and performance.

In the area of working in MNCs, the findings show that "development opportunities" was one of the two main reasons for the interviewees joining MNCs. Although many interviewees valued development opportunities, they claimed that their managers and organisations did not show interest in their development, and some of them even planned to leave their companies for another one which could offer them development opportunities. The findings suggest that offering development opportunities could help MNCs retain their experienced employees.

Fairness was another decision factor when the interviewees considered a job offer. Although many interviewees expected to see fairness exercised in their organisation, they claimed that they were let down by the perceived favouritism in the management, which could be one of the sources for the conflicts between locals and expatriates.

The findings also indicate that "less complicated human relationships" found in MNCs is the aspect that the interviewees liked most about their organisation's practice. While some interviewees were tired of the possible troubles caused by the complicated human relationships in the workplace, they agreed that *guanxi* is important to Chinese. The findings suggest that the management should consider how to make use *guanxi* in managing their local staff.

The interviews provided information on how the Chinese employees see their selves in relation to their managers and their work life in MNCs. The information collected also gave insights to possible implications for the management on managing human resources in China.

To understand the Chinese employees' perceptions further, in the next chapter, the seven themes will be interpreted first from a western perspective and then from a Chinese perspective.

Table 5.1: Interviewee profiles

Interviewees	Bio section		Remarks
Ms A	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing Swiss engineering company Executive late 30s 7 April 2004	left the company a few months after the interview to start her own business; she referred a number of interviewees
Mr B	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing Swiss engineering company Manager mid 40s 7 April 2004	
Mr C	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing Swiss engineering company Senior executive early 40s 7 April 2004	
Mr D	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing Swiss engineering company Manager early 40s 7 April 2004	
Ms E	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing Swiss engineering company Junior staff late 20s 7 April 2004	did not want to have the interview recorded
Mr F	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing French transportation company Senior executive late 30s 7 April 2004	
Mr G	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing American energy company Manager late 30s 29 March 2005	
Mr H	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing American energy company Senior executive early 40s 29 March 2005	
Mr XX	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing American energy company Senior executive mid 30s 29 March 2005	uncooperative; refused to have the interview recorded; interview only lasted for 15 minutes
Mr I	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing American logistics company Manager mid 30s 30 March 2005	

Interviewees	Bio section		Remarks
Mr J	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing American logistics company Manager late 30s 30 March 2005	
Mr K	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing HK transportation company Junior staff late 20s 30 March 2005	
Mr L	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing American transportation company Executive late 30s 30 March 2005	
Mr M	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing HK logistics company Manager late 30s 31 March 2005	
Mr N	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing Canadian transportation company Manager late 30s 31 March 2005	
Ms O	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing American logistics company Manager mid 30s 1 April 2005	
Ms P	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing American transportation company Manager late 30s 1 April 2005	
Ms Q	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Beijing HK logistics company Manager mid 40s 2 April 2005, 16 January 2006, 30 June 2006	She referred a number of interviewees
Ms R	Place: Company: Title: Age: Interview date:	Guangzhou German telecommunications company Executive early 30s 20 October 2005	

Interviewees	Bio section	Remarks
Mr S	Place: Guangzhou Company: American consultancy company Title: Senior executive Age: mid 30s Interview date: 20 October 2005	He referred a number of interviewees
Ms T	Place: Guangzhou Company: American manufacturing company Title: Junior staff Age: late 20s Interview date: 27 October 2005	
Ms U	Place: Guangzhou Company: American consultancy company Title: Junior staff Age: mid 20s Interview date: 27 October 2005	
Ms V	Place: Guangzhou Company: American manufacturing company Title: Manager Age: early 30s Interview date: 18 March 2006	She referred a number of interviewees
Mr W	Place: Guangzhou Company: French engineering company Title: Senior executive Age: early 30s Interview date: 18 March 2006	Tape recorder was broken, no recording
Ms X	Place: Guangzhou Company: French food company Title: Sales Executive Age: late 20s Interview date: 18 March 2006	Tape recorder was broken, no recording
Ms Y	Place: Guangzhou Company: American consultancy company Title: Executive Age: late 20s Interview date: 25 March 2006	
Mr Z	Place: Guangzhou Company: American manufacturing company Title: Manager Age: late 30s Interview date: 10 May 2006	

Chapter 6: Understanding Chinese Employees—Interpretations

6.1 Introduction

The literature review in Chapter 2 revealed that a major problem with the previous research in the field is an "asymmetrical understanding"; the majority of the studies were based solely on managerial responses excluding the voice of the employees. As indicated before, this research aims to overcome this "asymmetrical understanding" by positioning the research subject, Chinese employees, at the centre of a discursive space so that their voice is accounted for in a dialogue.

With this aim in mind, the voice of the Chinese employees working in MNCs was introduced through interviews. Through their narratives on their relationship with the supervisor, their career expectations and the practice of the organisation, the interviewees revealed how they made sense of their selves in the workplace.

To understand the voice of these Chinese employees, the interview data reported in Chapter 5 are scruitized through the notion of self from the western and Chinese perspectives discussed in Chapter 3. The analysis starts from a familiar perspective, western conceptual frameworks, to understand the seven themes emerged from the interview data. It then moves to an alternative perspective—the interview data are analysed through the Confucian and Taoist frameworks—to see whether further layers of understanding could be added.

6.2 From a western perspective

In this section, the interview data are interpreted from the notion of self discussed in conventional western conceptual frameworks of Giddens (1991), Taylor (1989), and

Ricoeur (1992) (see Table 6.1 for the summary, pp. 197–198). Drawing on the notion from these frameworks, this section explains the seven themes emerged from the data. While seeking to understand the themes, it also attempts to reveal the possible limits when the data are interpreted from western conceptual frameworks.

The analysis of the themes is mainly organised in the order of interest to the interviewees, but related themes would be put together. The first theme to be analysed is "job development opportunities", which was the theme that most interviewees were concerned about.

6.2.1 Job development opportunities

As shown in Chapter 6, the interviewees gave two main reasons for joining an MNC; having development opportunities was one of them (Section 5.3.1.1). (The other one was "fairness", which will be discussed in the next section.) It is evident that the interviewees valued development opportunities offered in their jobs. Why did these interviewees put a strong emphasis on the need for development? How would one explain this through a western conceptual lens?

Giddens recognises the importance of development. He regards self-reflexivity, the key concept in his framework, through therapy, as a process for individuals to grow. For example, in his discussion on journal writing as a means of self-reflexion, he suggests that journal writing helps individuals learn from "previously noted experiences and mistakes", thus they can experience "a continuing process of growth" (1991, p. 72). Giddens also discusses life-planning and according to him, new life-plans "involve(d) a commitment to personal growth" (p. 217).

Ricoeur's and Taylor's discussion on individuals' growth is mainly in the ethical aspect. Ricoeur talks about the growth of selfhood and regards that "self-esteem and self-respect together will represent the most advanced stages of the growth" (1992, p. 171). When will individuals have self-esteem and self-respect? For Ricoeur, when individuals can take moral action sharing others' suffering and showing sympathy to them, then they will be able to see that they themselves have the quality of being worthy of esteem or respect and they will have self-respect and self-esteem (Section 3.2.3.2).

Similarly, Taylor suggests that the real growth of the self is a journey that individuals grow from an average condition towards committing to the hypergoods which "stand independent of our own desires, inclinations, or choices" (1989, p. 20). This growth does not just go through childhood and adolescence, but continues even when individuals are in their adulthood.

As pursuing growth is perceived as important in the West, the management of MNCs should not find it difficult to appreciate their Chinese employees' wish for development. However, the management may be puzzled by the expectations of the Chinese employees on the role of their managers in their development. As shown in the interview data, many interviewees (e.g. Mr D and Mr H, Section 5.3.1.1) wanted to see their managers play an active role in enhancing their development and felt disappointed if their managers did not match this expectation.

While the Chinese employees may think that it is one of the key responsibilities of a manager to spend time on their subordinates helping them derive development plans, managers may not agree that they should take such an active role in their subordinates' development. Indeed, there is no evidence in Giddens', Taylor's or Ricoeur's frameworks that others are required to play an active role in individuals' growth. The discussion on the notion of growth from the three scholars, though does not clearly articulate, seems to suggest that seeking for advancement should be initiated by individuals themselves.

Although the existence of others is important for individuals' constitution of self in their frameworks, individuals are still responsible for their own growth.

In Giddens' framework, others may take a role as an expert to help individuals in their life choice (Section 3.2.1.2). However, there is no indication that Giddens believes that others are required to take up the responsibility to help individuals develop. Although individuals need the expert's help in their life choice, it is still up to individuals to decide to which expert they want to appeal for help and whether they would take the advice from the expert. Therefore, one could interpret that to the individuals, the experts are still instrumental for their constitution of self.

Similarly, in Taylor's framework, others clearly have a role in individuals' gr owth. Taylor views that the self can only make sense of itself as one self among other selves with whom it lives in the same community (Section 3.2.2.3). This refers to the individual's engagement with others in a narrative to share perceptions of the good through a common language. Nevertheless, for Taylor, the involvement with others should not 'destroy' the self's independence. If one follows Taylor's framework, one may interpret that if managers take up the responsibility to help their subordinates derive a development plan, it will jeopardise the subordinates' independence.

What would Ricoeur say? Ricoeur also contends that the self only exists with the presence of the other and the self has ethical responsibility for the other (Section 3.2.3.2). He believes there is no self without the other. The presence of the other is to help preserve one's self-esteem and self-respect, which represent the most advanced stages of an individual's growth. When one responds to the demand of the other, it shows that one is worthy for a good life. Nevertheless, individuals' growth may still be in the hands of themselves, but not in others'; the choice for responding to the demand of the other is unlikely to be taken out of the hands of the individuals. If one follows the logic, it would appear that it is individuals' duty for their own growth and they should not 'expect others to be in control of their growth.

The ideas of these scholars suggest that managers may regard it as the responsibility of Chinese subordinates as individuals to strive for their own development. If Chinese subordinates need help from their managers in their development, they should communicate their needs to their managers, and then their managers could respond to their request. If the employees do not make their development needs known, their managers would not know what their needs are. Managers may assume that individuals should have a certain degree of control in their own development, and if managers get involved too much in their subordinates' development, it may be perceived as interference. This may mean that they push beyond the boundary by invading these subordinates' privacy. Therefore, the source of possible ambiguity lies in the discrepancy between the Chinese employees' expectation and the managers' understanding of their responsibility, and the discrepancy between both parties' perceptions on boundary of privacy. It seems that more communication between the two parties is required to help adjust the expectations.

6.2.2 Fairness in the organisation

The findings show that many interviewees regarded fairness as important and they expected to see it practised in MNCs. In fact, it was one of the reasons why they joined MNCs, as they believed fairness was exercised in these organisations.

How is fairness understood from a western perspective? It seems that fairness is often perceived as closely related, if not equivalent to, justice. For example, in *Theory of Justice* (as citied in Riceour, 1992), when he reconciles equality and freedom, Rawls suggests that fairness is the key to the concept of justice, and ties the concept of equality to the concept of justice. Giddens is the only one of the three scholars that does not have much discussion on fairness or justice. Although he agrees that individuals' life choices would, in the end, have some sort of political implications, he is more interested in leaving the autonomy to individuals to create a "morally justifiable form of life that will promote self-actualisation in the context of global interdependence" (1991, p. 215). It seems that for Giddens, exercising justice or not is merely one of the individual's life choices, and there is no indication that he sees exercising justice as an important life choice that individuals are required to make. In other words, moral values do not come into the picture, if one follows Giddens. He is more concerned about personal desires rather than moral values (Section 3.2.1.4). Therefore, one may conclude that Giddens' framework is the least likely be able to help interpret the interviewees' expectation on fairness exercised in the organisation.

Unlike Giddens, Taylor puts moral values over desires. In his view, when needed, individuals should give up their basic desires (e.g. pleasure) for hypergoods (e.g. respect), the goods that are more important and serve as the standpoint for other goods (Section 3.2.2.2). These hypergoods emerge from three main sources of individuals' moral frameworks based on his study on the historical development of the West. One of the hypergoods that Taylor discusses is "benevolence" which calls upon individuals to care for justice and the well-being of others. In his view, this universal justice calls for "all human beings... treated equally with respect, regardless of race, class, sex, culture, religion" (1989, p. 64). For Taylor, the essence of universal justice is equality and respect.

Similar to Taylor, Ricoeur emphasises the importance of justice and regards it as one of the chief virtues because of its crucial role in achieving one's aim of living a good life (Section 3.2.3.2). Ricoeur has a precise idea of good life, which is "*to live well with and for others in just institutions*" [italics in the original] (1992, p. 239). In other words, justice is essential for individuals to live a good life. Ricoeur finds equality among individuals as the ethical core of justice. For him, human relationship must be reciprocal: oneself as an other and an other as oneself. This leads to the Golden Rule in the West: "Do not do to your neighbour what you would not want him to do to you" (van Schilfgaarde, 2009). This reciprocity adjoins justice, which is a condition of the recognition of the other. Justice in this sense has a place for equality of partners (others) in this reciprocal relationship. Ricoeur sees that justice, by way of the mutual respect among equals, is linked to friendship: "As for the corollary of reciprocity, ... it places friendship on the path of justice..." (1992, p. 188) and friendship entails care for others. Therefore, Ricoeur's justice calls for both equality and care.

If one follows Taylor's and Ricoeur's frameworks, one would conclude that equality, together with respect and care, is the essence of fairness. In fact, when some interviewees complained that fairness was not exercised in their organisations, the grounds for their complaint was that they were not treated equally. As shown in Chapter 5, some interviewees (e.g. Ms Q and Ms U, Section 5.3.1.2) believed that favouritism was shown in the management as there were different treatments of locals and expatriates, for example, in pay and promotion. Apparently, the fairness that the interviewees desired involves equality: wanting to see that they were treated as equal players to expatriates. For example, when they exhibit the competence, they should be considered for promotion, regardless of, say, an employee's nationality.

Considering that justice, with equality as the ethical core, tends to be an important quality in the West, managers should be able to appreciate the desire of the Chinese employees for fairness. If managers want to show to their subordinates that there is fairness in the organisation, following Taylor's and Ricoeur's ideas, they need to treat their subordinates equally, and with care and respect. It seems that the Chinese employees would welcome this—their managers treating them with equality and showing care and respect to them. In fact, the interviewees also perceived "respect" and "care and concern" as important. The two themes will be discussed in Section 6.2.4 and Section 6.2.5, respectively.

6.2.3 A harmonious working environment

Another theme that interested most of the interviewees was "harmony in the workplace". At one point or another in the discussion on how they handled disagreements with their managers, most of the interviewees brought up the theme of *he* (harmony) (Section 5.2.1.1). It appears that harmony in the workplace was valued among the interviewees.

How important is harmony in the Chinese context? If one wants an illustration, the 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony might be a good example to demonstrate the importance of the notion. A major theme of the Olympics was "harmony". Ancient Chinese characters of *he* (harmony) appeared several times during the performances expressing China's common pursuit of harmony in different historical periods (Kuhn, 2007). It echoes Confucius's idea of humanism, meaning "harmony is precious". In fact, *he* has been the principal theme of the Chinese Government for a number of years. The goal that Hu Jintao, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC), outlined in his report at the 17th National Congress of the CPC was to establish a harmonious society, such as narrowing the wealth gap between the rich and the poor, improving relations between humanity and the environment, and contributing to a peaceful world order (Xinhuanet, 2008b; Zheng, 2007a).

The interviewees claimed that they were not shy to express their ideas (Section 5.2.1), though they were very diplomatic in adopting a non-confrontational attitude in handling the situation to maintain a harmonious relationship with their managers. Some of the interviewees (e.g. Ms A and Ms P, Section 5.2.1.1) would wait for a proper time to persuade their managers again. They would not push their managers, but wait for the right moment to arrive. Some (e.g. Mr F, Section 5.2.1.1) said they would not defy their managers' decision openly, but they would find a way to get around the decision. Some (e.g. Mr C and Mr K, Section 5.2.1.1) talked about reaching a compromise. Others even said that they put forward their ideas in a 'half-serious, half-joking' manner (e.g. Mr S, Section 5.2.1.1) testing the reaction of their managers in a subtle way. All of these interviewees tried to get their point across, one way or the other, without arguing with their managers. Only when their attempts to convince their managers were in vain, some (e.g. Mr I and Ms R, Section 5.2.1.1) would then 'suppress' their ideas and follow their managers'. They believed if they insisted on their ideas, they would have conflicts with their managers and jeopardise the harmony in the workplace.

Harmony *(he)* undoubtedly occupies a prominent place in the Chinese context, but how is harmony understood from a western perspective? Giddens does not discuss the notion of harmony in his work. The nearest one that one may find is his notion of coherence. He believes that individuals need to go through various reflexive activities reaching a consistent life pattern to create a coherent sense of self, which in turn serves as the basis for individuals' ontological security (Section 3.2.1.2). This consistent life pattern may be understood as a 'harmonised life pattern'. However, one needs to be aware that Giddens is only concerned about exhibiting this 'consistency' in one's own self, rather than in one's relationships with others. Therefore, this 'harmony' at most is an internal one—a self-contained 'harmony'—instead of an external one, which the interviewees sought in the relationships with their managers. In other words, following Giddens' framework, the harmony is achieved within one's own self, but there is no indication that harmony with other individuals is encouraged.

As for Taylor, dialogues with others play an important role in individuals' formation of self. Taylor's recognition of the existence of dialogues may lead to possible harmony; however, upon scrutinising, as pointed out in Section 3.2.2.4, others are not significant to a degree that they can occupy a prominent place in Taylor's framework. Therefore, Taylor offers little substantive discussion on how important harmony is in the relationship with others, and the discussion is even less regarding how to reach and maintain this harmony. One may also suspect Taylor does not regard having a harmonious relationship with others as important; therefore, harmony has little weight in his framework.

It seems that Ricoeur would value harmony in the workplace as he sees that the aim of a good life is to "live well with and for others" (1992, p. 239). When individuals desire to live well with others, they would probably try to live in harmony with others. To achieve a harmonious relationship with others, Ricoeur emphasises friendship and justice as two chief virtues (Section 3.2.3.2). Friendship is a mutual relationship that calls for respect and love between the self and the other, whereas justice sets a general standard for individuals to act objectively and impartially with others. Accordingly, for Riceour, to have a harmonious relationship with others, individuals need to show their affection to others, and they also need to treat others without prejudice. Although the two chief virtues proposed by Ricoeur may play a crucial role in the issue of harmony, there is no evidence that he would encourage individuals to be diplomatic in achieving harmony in their relationship with others. Therefore, one might suspect that Ricoeur would not be able to appreciate the diplomatic actions employed by the Chinese employees. For example, if one follows Ricoeur, one may fail to see why the Chinese employees would suppress their ideas to achieve harmony. It seems that "living well with and for others" only calls for friendship and justice, but does not necessarily entail diplomatic actions.

If the western frameworks are followed, one may not be able to understand the diplomatic actions taken by local employees in handling their differences with the managers. When these actions remain puzzling to expatriates, they might not be able to appreciate the locals' desire to maintain a harmonious relationship in the workplace, which could be a cause for expatriates' misunderstanding of local employees. If this is the case, what could expatriates do? What are the sources that one could turn to for understanding the subject?

6.2.4 Mutual respect encouraged in the workplace

Diplomatic actions, such as making compromises and observing the right time, which are taken by the interviewees in handling disagreements with their managers, also implies that the interviewees had respect for authority. To do so, they (e.g. Mr G, Section 5.2.1.2) regarded it as their obligation not to insist on their ideas or question their managers' decision in public.

However, as discussed in the literature review, managers may misinterpret this form of respect as locals' inability to exercise independent thinking. This misconception from non-Chinese is evident in various studies. For example, the non-Chinese MBA students in Xu and Zhang's (2005) study on transnational encounters suggested that the Chinese MBA students were just followers who did not have their own ideas but merely followed whatever others proposed. This behaviour of Chinese generated resentment in the group. The managers in Wilkinson et al.'s (2005) study also complained that the locals were reluctant to express opinions (Section 2.3.3.4).

Is showing respect to others regarded as important from a western perspective? If one follows Giddens' ideas, one is likely to reach to conclude that there is no need to show respect to others, as they seem to be instrumental to individuals' formation of self. In Giddens' discussion on "pure relationships", it seems that it is up to individuals to decide whether to enter or to leave a relationship based on personal needs or pleasure (Section 3.2.1.3). It sounds like others are somewhat disposable. If that is the case, it is unlikely that others would enjoy respect in such relationships.

In contrast, both Taylor and Ricoeur value others and encourage respect for them. One of the hypergoods that Taylor has discussed is equal respect for all human beings regardless of their race, sex, religions and so on (Section 3.2.2.2). He points out that respect for human life is one of the universal human rights, and this respect includes a concern for the other. Taylor believes that individuals experience the goods that command their respect for others. In other words, showing respect to others is not solely from individuals' will or choice. In fact, for Taylor, it is also from individuals' inwardness—from innate moral feelings and responsibilities. Therefore, individuals are summoned by their inward depth and dignity to act in a respectful way to others.

As pointed out before, for Ricoeur, self-esteem and self-respect are both essential for the individual's ethical life. Individuals will not have this self-esteem or self-respect unless they can show that they respect others—suffering others—by not abusing their power over these suffering others. Not only does he argue that when oneself is an other and an other is oneself, self-respect will be extended to respect for others, he also makes it clear that there is no self respect without respect for others (Section 3.2.3.2). Therefore, there is little ambiguity that Ricoeur encourages respect for others.

If one follows Ricoeur's framework, as well as Taylor's framework, it would not be difficult to appreciate why the Chinese employees value respect for others. Ricoeur would be able to share the Chinese employees' view of the importance of mutual respect. However, as indicated in the interview data, some interviewees (e.g. Ms A and Ms R, Section 5.2.1.2) complained that some expatriates showed a contemptuous attitude towards the locals. Their behaviour seemed to be against what Taylor and Ricoeur have in mind. The expatriates might not intentionally disrespect the locals. If that is the case, it might be time for the management to consider what could be done to show respect to the locals.

Perhaps expatriates could start from the notion of face. When discussing issues related to respect, many interviewees (e.g. Ms A, Section 5.2.1.2) brought up the notion of face. Some interviewees (e.g. Mr W, Section 5.2.1.2) commented that expatriates may not realise how important face is to Chinese. In fact, the notion of face is not discussed in any of the frameworks of the three scholars. Expatriates may not be able to fully understand the complexity of the notion of face in the Chinese context. Some expatriates may see that the Chinese notion of face (*mianzi*) is similar to the western notion of reputation. If face may be understood as reputation, then the issue of face also exists in other countries. However, face is more than just reputation, as indicated in the interview data; it also concerns respect and honour. That perhaps makes the issue of face more complicated in China, and the management may need to be cautious when handling this issue.

6.2.5 Care and concern for subordinates

As shown in Chapter 5, most interviewees considered showing care and concern as one of the qualities of a competent supervisor. Some of them (e.g. Mr B and Mr K, Section 5.2.2.1) claimed that having a supervisor who showed care and concern is a source for their satisfaction. Care for others is clearly regarded as important by the interviewees, but is it also considered important from a western perspective?

Showing concern to others indeed is not unique in the Chinese culture. Among the three western scholars, Giddens is the only one who does not discuss anything about care and concern for others. He is more concerned about the self, and in his framework, the existence of others tends to be rather instrumental for individuals to pursue personal interest (Section 3.2.1.3). Therefore, Giddens' framework may be interpreted as a kind of radical individualism.

Taylor regards care and concern for others as important. Taylor perceives respect for human life, including a concern for others, as one of the most universally held moral instincts across cultures. Taylor also discusses the concept of benevolence, as one of the hypergoods, which calls upon individuals to care for the well-being of others, as well as justice (Section 3.2.2.2). When individuals see others suffer, they will be called upon and spontaneously show care to the suffering others.

Ricoeur insists that concern for others is crucial. For Ricoeur, individuals have indebtedness to each other, because they rely on each other to make sense of their selves (Section 3.2.3.3). To pay the 'debt', individuals have a duty to care for each other. Rioceur also sees that if oneself is an other and an other is oneself, one will be able to show concern to others and have empathy for them: their suffering becomes one's own suffering and their happiness becomes one's own happiness; to promote the well-being of others is to promote one's own well-being.

Apparently, care for others is perceived as important in the West. Therefore, managers would agree with their subordinates that showing care and concern to others is important. If that is the case, where is the disagreement? The interview data suggest that the major difference between expatriates and locals lies in the perceptions on how far one should go when showing concern. Some of the interviewees (e.g. Ms A and Mr H, Section 5.2.2.1) suggested that competent supervisors not only show concern for their work life, but also care about their other aspects like their personal feelings and family. Besides, the interview data show that Chinese employees' expectations of what individuals should do for others in time of need may go well beyond expatriates' expectations and perhaps acceptance as well. While Chinese employees expect their managers to offer help to them when they face difficulties in their life—work or personal, managers might worry that when they offer help without being asked, their help could be interpreted as interference with their subordinates' private life. In other words, the disagreement lies in their perceptions on the boundary of privacy.

Although Taylor regards care for others as crucial, his framework still upholds certain degree of individuality and his focus is still on individuals themselves (Section 3.2.2.4). While he suggests that the self exists among other selves and stresses the importance of engagement with others, Taylor offers little discussion on how others affect individuals' understanding of their selves. One may argue that, despite the importance of others, Taylor seems to suggest that the formation of self is still the sole responsibility of individuals. This helps explain why expatriates may regard that individuals' privacy is being violated if they insist on giving help even when others do not ask for it.

To what extent does Ricoeur help make sense of this? Despite his view that one self as an other and an other as one self, it seems that he would suggest that there is boundary between the self and the other; no matter whether it is the self or the other, they are still separate individuals. Following Riceour's ideas, the self is called to show empathy to the other. However, it does not seem that Riceour encourages one to act for others when one is not invited to do so. One may therefore suggest that both Ricoeur and Taylor perceive that there is a necessary boundary between individuals.

Following Taylor's and Ricoeur's frameworks, one might argue that for expatriates, the boundary between the self and the other is clearly set. If one does not observes this boundary when offering help, one's help might be regarded as interference. As for Chinese, as suggested in the interview data, this boundary seems to be rather indistinct. It seems that it is more likely that they would be grateful when others offer help, even in their personal life, without their asking. Therefore, the challenge for managers, as well as employees, is how to strike a balance between showing concern and respecting privacy.

6.2.6 Trust in subordinates

Other than showing care and concern, many interviewees also believed that showing trust to subordinates is another quality that a competent manager should demonstrate. As presented in the interview data, these interviewees (e.g. Mr F and Mr Z, Section 5.2.2.2) claimed that such trust helped build their self-confidence and they would feel anxious if their managers did not show trust in them. How could this be explained from a western perspective?

Only Giddens pays attention to the notion of trust among the three scholars. He suggests that trust, together with continuity, is the basis for the individual's ontological security (Section 3.2.1.2). He contends that basic trust comes from the coherent object-world. When there are so many changes in the object-world and the world is no longer coherent, individuals sustain trust through their coherent sense of the self, which is made possible by individual's self-reflexivity. Therefore, one could interpret it as that, for Giddens, the trust that engenders self-confidence comes from individuals themselves when they maintain a coherent self. If Giddens suggests that confidence comes from one's own self, then it is different from the interviewees' view that the source of their self-confidence comes from the trust that they gain from others in a form of recognition of their ability.

Although both Taylor and Ricoeur do not discuss the notion of trust, their arguments may help us understand why the interviewees said that they would do their job better if their managers show trust in them. Taylor contends that the self only exists among other selves and stresses that in interlocutions with others, individuals construct and confirm their values and beliefs (Section 3.2.2.3). Similarly, Ricoeur emphasises the importance of the relations with others in the constitution of self arguing for a self of reciprocity (Section 3.2.3.4). It seems that both suggest a reciprocal relationship between the self and the other. In this reciprocal relationship, in response to their managers' trust, the interviewees would try their best to improve themselves and do their job well. Therefore, one may argue that the trust from the manager serves as the motivation for the subordinate to work hard. If that is the case, the management perhaps should consider how they could make use of this to motivate their local employees.

Upon scrutiny, when the interviewees felt that their managers did not trust them, they felt anxious. Many at some point gave up but a few adopted a coping mechanism to overcome their anxiety brought by the distrust from the management. For example, one of the interviewees (Mr F, Section 5.2.2.2) chose to feign compliance. Managers might find it difficult to comprehend the rationale behind Mr F's action. They probably see that local employees should not expect that their managers trust them before they have proven themselves to be trustworthy.

Following Giddens' framework, one may see that it is important for individuals to take the initiative to earn or keep the trust. Giddens argues that in the pure relationship, trust can "no longer be anchored in criteria outside the relationship itself—such as criteria of kinship, social duty or traditional obligation" (1991, p. 6). He upholds that trust has to be won but cannot be taken as given (Section 3.2.1.3). As in the modern world, trust has no external supports and has to be developed on the basis of intimacy through mutual disclosure demonstrating their capability for achieving intimacy. Ricoeur also views that in the reciprocal relationship between the self and the other, individuals need to keep their word to prove they are trustworthy so as to maintain the trust from the other that they are remain the same (Section 3.2.3.1). In other words, individuals not only need to earn the trust but also need to keep and renew it constantly.

The above m ay help explain why some managers would hesitate to empower their subordinates. As trust needs to be earned, the subordinates need to show that they are trustworthy; for instance, because of their competence before their managers could put trust in these subordinates by empowering them. If trust needs to be earned, why then were the Chinese employees so disappointed when their managers did not show trust in them? If one interprets the Chinese employees' behaviour in Giddens' and Ricoeur's frameworks, one may find the behaviour unreasonable. However, did the Chinese employees have grounds for such expectation? The management perhaps needs to find a way to understand the rationale behind such an expectation. Knowing the reason for the expectation might help the management overcome the differences.

6.2.7 *Guanxi*: relationship with others

A theme that most interviewees brought up was "the human relationships in the workplace". These interviewees found that they were attracted to the "less complicated human relationships in MNCs", which was also their consideration when deciding to work in an MNC.

It is well-known that the Chinese society is relation-based (Liang, 1987). Despite the fact that the interviewees were tired of the negative impacts of *guanxi*, they all recognised its importance in China and *guanxi* has a great influence on business. In fact, *guanxi* is not a term that easily interpreted from a western perspective, and when it is interpreted, it is commonly interpreted in a negative tone. Given that *guanxi* is too important to be ignored, MNCs should have an understanding of what the term means to local employees and how they practise it.

The interviewees believed that many expatriates are aware of the importance of *guanxi*. This is not difficult to understand, as relationships are important in the West as well. For Giddens, relationships are of "elementary importance for the reflexive project of the self" (1991, p. 88). However, he sees that relationships ('pure relations') are formed by individuals' choice; he believes that personal needs or pleasure are the reasons for individuals to commit to a relationship (Section 3.2.1.3). For Giddens, relationships may be instrumental but they are still crucial for individuals to reach a coherent self, which he perceives as the aim of life for individuals.

Taylor believes that the existence of others is very important for individuals' constitution of self. He views that individuals define their selves in dialogue with others (Section 3.2.2.3). Through dialogue, individuals share their ideas and defend their values realising what exactly they believe. He argues that the self is socially constituted, that in fact suggests relations with others are important to individuals to make sense of their selves. However, he does not have a lot of discussion on the role that others play in individuals' life, and these others are more or less reduced to the mode of individuals' construction. Therefore, it seems there is a slight hint of the other being a means only to individuals for their formation of self in Taylor's framework. Shen (2008) introduces Taylor's ideas in his discussion on the concepts of 'Multiple Others' and 'harmony', and he queries whether Taylor has a real concept of others. In Taylor's framework, it seems that there is no genuine existence of others, and others are only reducible to one's self construction.

Even though both Giddens and Taylor recognise the importance of others to individuals' quest for the self, they may not be able to appreciate the sophisticated and complex relationships between individuals and others in a Chinese context. That may explain why many cannot sufficiently appreciate the complexity of *guanxi* (relationships). As pointed out by the interviewees (e.g. Ms T, Section 5.4.1.1) some expatriates may simply understand it as short-term relationships and some understand the aim of *guanxi* is to seek instant benefits only. The perception of these expatriates is quite similar to Giddens' description of a pure relationship which "is sought only for what the relationship can bring to the partners involved" (1991, p. 90). This seemingly calculative nature of the relationship may describe some of the 'unethical' *guanxi* which is despised by many Chinese.

To what extent could Riceour help make sense of this? If one follows Ricoeur's framework, one would be able to appreciate the importance and complexity of relationships with others to Chinese. He denies the possibility that the self can 'exist' without the relationship with the other, and he devotes a lot of time to discuss the role that others play in individuals' life. For Ricoeur, individuals' stories are interwoven with others' stories. Through their discussions and interactions with others, individuals help others make sense of their selves and vice versa (Section 3.2.3.1). Therefore, individuals' sense of self is embedded with their relations with others. Unlike Giddens, and perhaps Taylor as well, Ricoeur does not regard these relations as instrumental. On the contrary, he believes that they are a crucial part in the good life that individuals pursue. He declares that the aim of life is "living the good life with and for others in just institutions." (1992, p. 172) "(L)iving with and for others" shows that individuals have a mutual and reciprocal relationship with other people. He also discusses multiple others categorising them into different types (Section 3.2.3.3), though his classifications are not as complex as those found in the Chinese culture. Considering that relationship with others is so important to the Chinese employees and even Ricoeur's framework is not sufficient to capture the complexity of this notion, one may need to turn to an alternative framework for an understanding.

The analysis above interpreted the findings through conventional western conceptual frameworks. While these frameworks could analyse the data to a certain degree, some areas are not explained. The question is, is this all what one can arrive at? Could further layers of meaning be added? In the following section, non-western conceptual frameworks are brought in to see if further insight could be produced.

6.3 From a Chinese perspective

In Section 6.2, the seven themes emerged from the interview data were interpreted through the notion of self in Giddens', Taylor's and Ricoeur's frameworks. While these frameworks were able to help explain the attitude or behaviour of the Chinese employees to a certain extent, some of it remains puzzling to expatriates. In this section, the seven themes (in the same order) are read again through the notion of self in the Confucian and Taoist frameworks to derive a supplementary understanding of the research subject under study (see Table 6.2 for the summary, pp. 199–200).

6.3.1 Job development opportunities

The data in Chapter 5 reveal that the interviewees valued development in their job; whether a job offers development opportunities or not is crucial for their considering the offer. Some interviewees (e.g. Mr D and Ms V, Section 5.3.1.1) warned that if development opportunities in their organisation become scarce, they would consider joining state-owned-enterprises (SOEs) or Privately-owned-enterprises (POEs) as they believed some of these enterprises, especially those large enterprises, provide opportunities for their staff to advance.

Why are development opportunities so important to them? How is this understood from a Chinese perspective? Confucian teachings stress the importance of individuals' development. Confucians devote a lot of effort in educating individuals to seek self-development. Confucians see that the development is a life-long process (Section 3.3.1). Although Confucians' discussions are primarily on individuals' ethical development, this striving for personal growth is manifested in many aspects of life.

Is development perceived as important in the Taoist perspective? It may seem that Taoists do not regard development as important, as Laozi advised, "exterminate sageness and abandon knowledge, and the people will benefit a hundredfold" (*Daodejing*, 19, in Chen & Zhang, 2001, p. 55). Why did Laozi advocate this? It is because Laozi valued *wuwei* (non-assertive action) and believed individuals' growth would come spontaneously without individuals seeking development sedulously (Section 3.3.2.4). Therefore, although Taoists value development, they do not advocate individuals to seek growth intentionally. It seems that the interviewees did not take a Taoist view in their development; on the contrary, they actively 'sought for' advancement. They joined MNCs because they perceived that MNCs offered more development opportunities offered than SOEs did. When they saw that there was no opportunities for them to advance, they might leave the company to join one that could offer them such opportunities. To Taoists, these actions might be interpreted as assertive.

The interviewees (e.g. Ms P and Mr W, Section 5 .3.1.1) not only wanted to have development opportunities in their work, but also wished that their managers play an active role in enhancing their development. They felt disappointed if their managers failed to meet this expectation. Why did the interviewees want and expect their managers to take an active role in their development? While one may find it difficult to see the rationale from a western perspective (Section 6.2.5), one may be able to explain by following the Confucian framework, As explained in Section 6.3.3, in the reciprocal relationship between the supervisor and supervisee, one of *wulun* (the five cardinal relations), subordinates are expected to demonstrate their respect for their managers, and managers in turn are expected to express their care and concern for their subordinates; for example, by taking care of their welfare. Offering opportunities to the subordinates for development could be seen as a way of promoting their welfare. Influenced by the Confucian tradition, Chinese employees may think that it is one of the key responsibilities of a manager to spend time on their subordinates helping them derive development plans. This might explain why the interviewees expected their managers to be actively involved in their development.

Another contention could be that many Chinese tend to consider that it is an ethical obligation for individuals to help others achieve advancement. Confucians value *ren* (authoritative conduct) in their relationship with others, and *ren* can be shown by establishing others and seeking to develop them (Section 3.3.1.3.1). Therefore, the interviewees expected their managers to manifest *ren* by helping them in their development.

Indeed, Confucians believe that "*bu ren bu yi shi xiaoren*" (a person who is not authoritative or righteous is a mean-spirited person). Confucius taught one to be "*qin xian ren, yuan xiaoren*" (be intimated with a person with virtue and stay away from a mean-spirited person). That might be part of the reason why a few interviewees (e.g. Ms U, Section 5.3.1.1) said that they would leave the organisation: to keep themselves away from their managers whom they deemed as showing no authoritative conduct (*ren*), nor appropriateness (*yi*).

Acknowledging the importance of development to local employees and realising the essential role that they play in their subordinates' development, managers may need to evaluate how development opportunities could be used to attract and retain talent and how they could be more involved in their subordinates' development plans.

6.3.2 Fairness in the organisation

As discussed in Section 6.2.2, another major reason for the interviewees joining MNCs was the perceived fairness in these organisations. The section revealed that fairness is emphasised in Taylor's and Ricoeur's frameworks and following these two frameworks, one would be able to understand why the Chinese employees value fairness in their organisations. Is the same emphasis on fairness found in the Confucian and Taoist frameworks?

If a conventional perspective is followed, one would perceive that the Confucian framework advocates hierarchy and fairness is not valued in this framework. The Confucian framework is commonly regarded as encouraging inequality because the

Confucian concepts *wulun* and *li* seem to place more power in the hands of one group (i.e. the superior, parent, husband, elder brother/sister, and older friend) and exploit another (i.e. the subordinate, child, wife, younger brother, and younger friend) (Section 3.3.1.3.2). However, the focus of the concepts is on the rights as well as obligations associated with different social roles rather than emphasising the authority that one group has over another.

The concept of equality in fact is found in the Confucian framework. Confucius once said, "*xing xiang jin*" ([People are] close to each other in nature.) (*Lunyu*, 17:2; in Zheng, 2007b, p. 262). Confucians believe *tian* (Heaven) created everything, including humans, and everyone was born with equal 'heavenly nature', intrinsic goodness (Section 3.3.1.1). Whether to manifest this intrinsic goodness or not depends on individuals' will. If a person chooses to manifest his or her intrinsic goodness, he or she will be a *junzi* (virtuous person); if the person does not, he or she will be a *xiaoren* (a mean-spirited person). To help individuals cultivate their virtues, Confucius emphasised education and he advocated education for all. From the very beginning, Confucius made education available to people from all classes, which embodies the idea of equality.

The interviewees sometimes used fairness and justice interchangeably. What does justice mean in the Confucian framework then? The Chinese term for justice is *gong yi*. For the first word *gong*, examining the relation between the ruler and the ministers, one of *wulun*, will give us some ideas about its meaning. The ethical norm associated with one's role as the ruler is being fair to his subordinates, the ministers. The ruler is expected to be impartial (*gong*) when he selects or promotes his subordinates considering their virtuousness and competence in serving in government disregarding their social and economic background. The ethical norm associated with one's role as the ruler (or the government) is treating the subjects (or the people) impartially without favouritism or discrimination. The ruler is expected to be "*da gong wu si*" (unbiased) in handling civic duties. The second word *yi* is one of the five fundamental Confucian virtues and it refers to the appropriateness of one's action. To act according to *yi* is to act in accordance with the ethical norm associated with one's role in *wulun* (the five cardinal relations) and the situation at hand (Section 3.3.1.3.2). Therefore, being impartial would be regarded as an appropriate action for the supervisor to take in the relationship with his or her subordinates, which may explain why the Chinese employees perceived their manager exercising justice as important.

How does the Taoist framework discuss justice? One might suspect the Taoist framework does not value justice or fairness as Laozi advised against justice. However, like the reason for him to advise abandoning knowledge (Section 6.3.1), Laozi believed that justice would emerge without effort: "...abandon justice, and the people will return to filial piety and parental love" (*Daodeiing*, 19, in Chen & Zhang, 2001, p. 55). If one looks at the central tenet of the Taoist framework, one may be able to have a fair view on how Taoists see fairness. For them, everything in the world is created by *dao* (way) (Section 3.3.2.1). Since everything has the same origin, there is no distinction between being noble and humble for mankind. Therefore, without prejudice or preference, we should be able to treat individuals impartially.

However, the interview data show that some interviewees perceived that fairness was not sufficiently exercised in their organisations, as there were different treatments of locals and expatriates in pay and opportunities for promotion. One may ask if Confucians do not find inequality of wealth in itself unfair or unjust, then why did the interviewees, who showed traces of Confucian values in their thinking, have such a strong view against these different treatments? Confucians may not have a strong view against material inequality, but they require the ruler (supervisor) to treat the subordinates impartially including fair distribution of benefits and burdens based on individual merit. If MNCs believe there is a need to introduce different treatments of locals and expatriates in those aspects, they need to justify it showing that they do not encourage favouritism. Considering that fairness is valued by local employees, the management may need to reflect on how to ensure and show that fairness is exercised in the organisation.

6.3.3 A harmonious working environment

As pointed out before, the interview data show that the interviewees regarded maintaining harmony (*he*) as important when they handled their disagreements with their managers. In Section 6.2.3, the notion of harmony was interpreted in Ricoeur's framework providing a possible explanation of its importance to the Chinese employees. While Riceour's framework may help explain why harmony is important, it does not help understand the diplomatic approach that some interviewees took to avoid conflicts. In this section, the notion of harmony is re-examined in the Confucian and Taoist frameworks to derive some possible explanations of the diplomatic approach adopted by the interviewees.

In the Confucian framework, achieving a harmonious society is the foremost moral goal (King & Bond, 1985). The Confucian concept of *dao* (the human way) shows that the Confucian vision of a good human life is individuals living harmoniously with others, including nature, other human beings, and other creatures (Section 3.3.1.1). Individuals realise *dao* by acquiring *de* (virtues).With *de* (ethics of *ren*, *yi*, *li*, *zhi* and *xin*) even ordinary people can lead a distinctive human life "living in dignified harmony with others" (Liu, 2004, p. 364).

How relevant is the Taoist framework? Taoists advocate returning to nature and harmonising with nature (Section 3.3.2.1). They suggest that to be a person that follows *dao* (the way of Heaven), individuals should live in harmony with the fundamental patterns of nature rather than disobey or ruin the harmony of nature. In the process, individuals have to forget their own selves and allow their mind and body to abide by nature so as to be spontaneous to *dao*. Therefore, individuals are encouraged to be peaceful and compliable rather than competitive. For Taoists, when one is peaceful and compliable, one can then live in harmony with others.

It seems that both frameworks emphatically stress harmony. Indeed, harmony can be said as one of the most treasured social values among Chinese. It is not difficult to find phrases that are associated with *he* in the Chinese language, like "*he wei gui*" (Harmony is valuable.) and "*jia he wan shi xing*" (If the family lives in harmony, all things will be prosperous.).

To maintain harmony, some interviewees (e.g. Mr I and Ms O, Section 5.2.1.1) claimed that they would choose to suppress their ideas in order to avoid conflicts. It seems that for Chinese, to be able to have a harmonious relationship with others, under certain circumstances, the self may become less important and it is more likely to be sacrificed. How can this be explained? In the Confucian framework, individuals are discouraged from seeking self-expression and are required to *keji* (restrain the self). When individuals discipline themselves, they will not be infatuated with "ego advantages" but will take others into consideration and try to unite the self with others and become a person with *ren* (authoritative conduct) (Hall & Ames, 1987). While Confucians encourage individuals to restrain the self, Taoists take a more aggressive approach and advocate *wuwo* (selfless) (Munro, 1969). When one forgets about one's self, one can then harmonise oneself with nature. Examples of *keji* or *wuwo* can be found in the interviews, in which the interviewees often used "you", "they" and "we" instead of "I", and in fact, they were referring to they themselves. For instance, instead of saying "*I will make adjustment*", Mr C said "*We will make adjustment*" (Section 5.2.1.1); instead of saying "*I feel bad, I feel hurt*", Ms A said "*you feel bad, you feel hurt*" (Section 5.2.1.2). This suggests that the interviewees were reluctant to put their selves (*ji*) in the centre; instead they tried to integrate themselves with others showing that they are part of the group.

At some points, individuals are requested to make self sacrifice in order to preserve the harmony of or to benefit the group. In Chinese, there is a saying "*xi sheng xiao wo, wan cheng da wo*" (sacrifice the small self (individual) for the sake of the big self (group, community)). For example, an employee might change his or her personal plan for vacation in order to work with his or her colleagues together to finish an urgent project for the company; a member may forego his or her personal interest so as to accommodate the need of the group. If one insists on the right to self-interest, tension in the group might arise. This suggests that a harmonious human relationship with others involves restraining oneself and considering the interest and the need of the group.

The interview data show that to maintain a harmonious relationship with their managers, the interviewees were quite diplomatic in adopting a non-confrontational style in handling the situation. Some of them (e.g. Ms P and Ms T, Section 5.2.1.1) said that they would wait for a proper time to persuade their managers again. They would not push their managers, but wait for the right moment to arrive. Waiting for the right moment is very crucial for Chinese, because that will help them minimise obstruction when achieving their goals. However, when is the right time to put their ideas forward again? The interviewees believed that when their managers had learned from the experience, it would be easier for them to persuade their managers to accept their idea. If one follows the Taoist framework, one would see the trace of *wuwei* (non-assertive action), a Taoist notion, in the way that the interviewees handled the differences between them and their managers. Adopting a *wuwei* attitude requires individuals to observe their environment and to position themselves into that environment in such a way that allows them to respond effortlessly and spontaneously to any situation or circumstance (Section 3.3.2.4). For example, in Ms A's case (Section 5.2.1.1), she intended to put forward her ideas again after her manager had tried out his idea without success. By then, her manager would probably be ready and willing to listen to her suggestions. That means Ms A would not need to push her ideas through. Therefore, if one attempts to push things through intentionally when the conditions are 'unripe', one would encounter a lot of difficulties and the success would not come easily. Therefore, the key to success is to be patient and wait until the conditions are ready. In other words, when conditions are ripe, success will come naturally.

While some interviewees adopted a *wuwei* attitude in handling the situation, a few interviewees chose to "*yang feng yin wei*" (comply in public but oppose in private). They perceived that on the one hand they needed to show respect and give face to their managers by not openly defying managers' instructions; on the other hand they had to insist on doing the things that they believed to be right. Why would these interviewees do this? In the Confucian framework, defying the management in public is not deemed to be an acceptable behaviour, as it is against *li* (ritual propriety). Confucians believe if individuals act appropriately in their roles and relationships defined by *wulun* (five cardinal relations), harmony will be achieved. In the supervisor and subordinate relation, one of the *wulun*, if subordinates act according to *li*, they should respect the supervisor (Section 3.3.1.3.3). If subordinates defy their managers in public, the managers will lose face, which is deemed to be inappropriate. This lends support to the argument put forward by Wilkinson et al. (2005). Based on their study on 17 FIEs, Wilkinson et al. suggest that local employees may feel that they would embarrass others if they dig into problems, and the employees regarded such behaviour as impolite and undesirable (Section 2.2.3.2).

Although maintaining a harmonious relationship is important, it does not necessarily entail uncritical thinking. In fact, without arguing with their managers, the interviewees still tried to get their point across, one way or the other. Some interviewees (e.g. Mr C and Mr K, Section 5.2.1.1) talked about reaching a compromise. As long as they got the principles agreed, they did not mind small differences. Some (e.g. Ms S, Section 5.2.1.1) said that to avoid possible confrontation, they would put forward their ideas in a 'half-serious half-joking' manner, which would allow them some flexibility to change their mind or even withdraw their ideas during the discussion process without causing any embarrassment to both parties, hence no one would lose face. Their ways of handling differences or disagreement are in line with the Confucian teaching. Confucius advocated that maintaining harmony does not necessarily require individuals to give up their unique thoughts:

> "The gentleman *(junzi)* agrees with others without being an echo. The small man (*xiaoren*) echoes without being in agreement." (*Lunyu*, 8:23; in Lau, 1992, p. 129).

Confucius's view of harmony can be illustrated by his affection with delightful music. Delightful music is tolerant in allowing each musical note to have its place, bringing them together and turning them into a beautiful tune. However, if the tune only contains one musical note, for example "do", it probably would not be delightful to be listened to. As Li (2006) suggests, "Confucian harmony is not mere agreement without difference; it is not meant to preserve peace at any cost". What Confucians advocate is to reserve differences without coming into conflicts. Therefore, harmony can be "*he er bu liu*" (harmony without following others mindlessly) (*Zhongyong*, 10). To be "*he er bu liu*", one should not follow others without thinking critically; one could have different ideas but should be prepared to incorporate others' ideas.

Following the Confucian and Taoist frameworks, one may now be able to see why Chinese very often seem to be unwilling to give opinions or to question. Unlike what some expatriates suspect (Ahlstrom et al., 2001; Björkman & Lu, 1999)—Chinese lack independent thinking, they keep quiet only because they wish to avoid confrontation. Given that the notion of harmony is very important to Chinese, managers may need to find ways to encourage their employees to express ideas without jeopardising their valued harmony in the workplace.

6.3.4 Mutual respect encouraged in the workplace

As discussed before, the non-confrontational manner adopted by the interviewees in handling disagreements with their managers implies that they showed respect for authority. To do so, they regarded it as their obligation for not insisting on their ideas or questioning their managers' decision in public, and they might put forward their ideas in a subtle way instead. This respect for authority can be traced to the Confucian principle of *li* (ritual propriety) and *wulun* (five cardinal relationships). It is commonly regarded that *li* helps individuals properly know their places in society, and it defines the appropriate social behaviour and conduct of various roles in the *wulun*. However, it is important to point out that, for Confucians, *li* is more than dogmatic and meaningless ritual; it is the external expression of the internal morality (Section 3.3.1.3.3). The interviewees recognised that their managers had the authority in this supervisor and subordinate relation, one of the *wulun*, and this authority came from their position as the supervisor. As explained in Section 6.3.3, as a subordinate in the relationship, and to act according to *li*, the interviewees needed to respect their managers.

However, as shown in the literature review, instead of recognising the subtlety of the local employees in expressing their ideas as a form of respect for the authority, managers might misinterpret it negatively as the local employees' reluctance to share their views (Section 2.2.3.4). Why are the local employees so 'reluctant' in expressing themselves? A common perception among Chinese: "*zhi zhe bu yan, yan zhe bu zhi*" (A wise man does not talk [a lot]; the man who talks [a lot] is not wise.) (*Daodejing*, 56; in Chen & Zhang, 2001, p. 154) may explain this. Chinese generally believe that things should not be said in an explicit way revealing all the details. Like Chinese *shuimu hua* (landscape paintings), which is significantly influenced by the Taoist teaching, using the techniques of *shi* (solid, strong) and *xu* (void, weak)[17,18] the painter puts on the paper the fewest possible lines; just

17 Japanese refer the concept as notan: no (dense) and tan (dilute) and this involves the use of light and dark arrangement.

enough to capture the "feel" of the object rather than reproduce its appearance (Brine, 2007; McMahon, 2003). Chinese believe if things are said in a very explicit way, it would be very difficult for them and others to back down with good grace later when the situation turns into a predicament. After all, the notion of face (*mianzi*) is very important for Chinese and it is their 'obligation' to save others' face. (This notion will be discussed later.) Perhaps it is this preferred subtlety, or some (e.g. Fan, 2007) would describe it as ambiguity, of Chinese that puzzles some outsiders or observers and is a source of misinterpretation. This sets another challenge for managers, which is to be able to read the subtlety of the 'behaviour' of the local employees.

One may argue that there are other reasons, besides the above explanations, for locals' reluctance to express opinions in an assertive way. For example, it may be because Chinese employees do not want to get the boss agitated or to be seen as a trouble-maker. However, it may also be because of Chinese preference for avoiding confrontation. As discussed in the previous section, harmony (*he*) is valued by Chinese, and they would try their best to avoid arguments, especially in public.

While the interviewees said that they would show respect to their managers, some of them (e.g. Ms A and Ms R, Section 5.2.1.2) complained of not being respected by their managers. Why is being respected by their managers important to the employees? In the Confucian framework, universal respect is advocated because Confucians believe that every person is endowed with innate virtues (Section 3.3.1.1). Therefore, even *xiaoren* (a mean-spirited person) deserves some respect because he or she has inborn potential virtues. Confucius practised what he preached. He respected people even if they were 'inferior' to him, such as people from the humblest backgrounds, thinking that he could always learn something from these people.

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18 These strokes of *shi* and *xu* create the image just like *you* (being) and *wu* (beingless), the Taoist concepts, creating the myriad things under Heaven (Section 3.3.2.1).

How does the Taoist framework explain the notion of equal respect? As mentioned before, Taoists believe that everything is created by *dao* and everything has the same origin. When there is no distinction between being 'noble' and 'humble' for humans; all deserve respect. The Taoist conception of *yin* and *yang* suggests that human beings, as well as all things in nature, deserve equal respect. If individuals are humble enough, they would be able to see that others may appear 'weaker' (*yin*) than them in certain aspects, but could be stronger (*yang*) in other aspects. In fact, no matter whether they are *yin* (e.g. weak) or *yang* (e.g. strong), they are the crucial components complementing each other to form the whole; without either one, the whole will not be complete. It is this belief that calls for equal respect for human beings. Considering that mutual respect is valued in both Chinese frameworks, managers may need to consider how they could show this respect to their subordinates, especially since the interview data suggest that treating Chinese employees with disrespect could be a source of conflict (Section 5.2.1).

As mentioned in Section 6.2.4, many interviewees brought up the issue of face in the interviews when talking about respect, which suggests that the issue of respect is closely related to the concern for face. Many interviewees regarded it as their obligation to show respect for authority. However, as pointed out by one of the interviewees, Ms Q (Section 5.2.1.2), the employees might withdraw their respect to the manager and confront him or her, even in public, if the manager is perceived to have acted against *li* (ritual propriety) and disrespected the employees first. For example, the behaviour of the manager has pushed the employees over the edge by damaging their face in public. To protect their face, the employees might think that they need to fight back like the secretary stood up against her manager (Section 5.2.1.2).

Why is the notion of face (*mianzi*) so important to Chinese? There is a well-known Chinese saying: "*ren yao mian, shu yao pi*" (Humans live for face as trees grow for bark.). Face to individuals is just like bark to trees—both are essential and provide protection.

This perhaps can give us a sense of the significance of the notion. *Mianzi* represents an individual's reputation, social status, character, and achievements. It also shows how the individual is recognised in the community (Liang, 1987). Quite often, when individuals are at a higher position, have greater achievements or possess more resources, they are 'given' more *mianzi*. *Mianzi* is 'given' by others. The individual evaluates his or her own values and importance by examining how many people 'give' him or her *mianzi*. The more people 'give' *mianzi* to an individual, the higher self-esteem he or she may feel. Therefore, when their managers did not give them *mianzi*, the interviewees might feel upset as their self-esteem was put into doubt.

Some expatriates may not sufficiently appreciate the importance of *mianzi* to Chinese. For Chinese, *mianzi* enables people to show respect to others. They are aware that even people from the lowest rank deserve others to save their face by respecting them. As demonstrated before, Confucius perceived that everyone deserves respect and he showed respect to those at a lower rank and believed he could learn from them—from those at a lower rank. The notion of *mianzi* helps avoid conflicts among people and enables them to maintain a harmonious relationship with others.

Since *mianzi* is so important, Chinese not only protect their own *mianzi*, but are also careful not to embarrass others in public so as not to damage others' *mianzi*. This behaviour can be explained through the Confucian concept of *ren* (authoritative conduct). *Ren* calls on individuals to consider others requiring them to follow the Golden Rule in the Chinese culture: "*ji suo bu yu, wu shi yu ren*" (What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others.). Following this Golden Rule, since Chinese do not want to be embarrassed in public, they try to avoid embarrassing others in public. To save their managers' face, as well as to show respect to their managers, the interviewees chose not to question or confront their managers in public when they had disagreement. The interviewees' behaviour in this study confirms the suspicion expressed by Wilkinson et al.

(2005). Wilkinson et al. suggest that the face issue in the Chinese culture is the reason that Chinese employees do not want to question things, fearing that this would embarrass others (Section 2.2.3.4). If protecting others' face is a way to show respect to others in the Chinese context, expatriates may need to be more sensitive in handling face issues in the relationships with their Chinese subordinates.

6.3.5 Care and concern for subordinates

As the data show, most interviewees believed a competent supervisor would be able to show care and concern for others. Why is such care regarded as important among Chinese? If one looks at this through the Confucian framework, one may understand why Chinese value such care and concern. In the reciprocal relationships, *wulun*, according to *li*, subordinates are expected to show their respect for their managers; managers in turn are expected to express their care and concern for the subordinates (Section 3.3.1.3.3). To a certain extent, this is close to the notion of the social contract in the West. Social contract implies that people give up sovereignty to a government or other authority in order to receive or maintain social order. In the reciprocal supervisor and supervisee relationship, the subordinate respects the authority of the supervisor, in return, the supervisor shows consistent concern for the well-being of the subordinate. Therefore, for Confucians, the supervisor has an obligation to take care of the subordinate's welfare.

Some interviewees (e.g. Mr B and Mr K, Section 5.2.2.1) said that though they respected their managers because the managers had authority, it is important that the managers should gain the respect from their subordinates by showing their subordinates care and concern, and not just by relying on their authority. For Confucians, it is better to "*yi de fu ren*" (convince people by ethical virtues) instead of "*yi li fu ren*" (convince people by force):

> "When people submit to force they do so not willingly but because they are not strong enough. When people submit to the transforming influence of morality they do so sincerely, with admiration in their hearts." (*Mengzi*, 2A:3; in Lau, 2003, p. 69)

Mencius, the Confucian scholar, suggested that persuading others through *de*, rather than using force, is more likely to get people be sincerely convinced. This may explain why the Confucian framework emphasises *de* (ethical virtues), in which there are five fundamental virtues: *ren*, *yi*, *li*, *zhi* and *xin*. Among the five virtues, *ren* (authoritative conduct) is deemed to be the most important one. Indeed, Confucians often describe a competent ruler as *ren jun* (a benevolent ruler, a ruler of authoritative conduct). *Ren* is expressed through recognition of value and concern for others (Section 3.3.1.3.1). *Mencius*, one of the principal interpreters of Confucian teachings, maintained that government should adopt *ren zheng* (policy of benevolence). This might explain why the interviewees wanted to see that their supervisor shows the quality of *ren* when managing the staff.

In the Taoist framework, there is a concept similar to the Confucian *ren*, which is *ci* (compassion, tenderness), one of *sanbao* (three treasures). For Taoists, *sanbao* are the three basic virtues that individuals should have. The word *ci* is often associated with parents, especially mother, describing the tender love or nurturing showed by them (Section 3.3.2.3). This is not to suggest that the employees should be treated as children, rather than grown-ups. On the contrary, if subordinates are treated as children, they might interpret this as distrust. (The issue of distrust will be discussed in the following session.) The Taoist concept of *ci*, in fact, emphasises the spontaneous nature of benevolence in a reciprocal relationship. Therefore, the local employees might assume when they show respect to their managers, naturally the managers would show care to them. This explains why these employees felt disappointed when their managers did not show care and concern to them.

Some interviewees (e.g. Ms A and Mr H, Section 5.2.2.1) described their supervisors who showed them care and concern as *you renqing* (showing humanity) and working with such supervisors would enhance their morale. *Renqing* literally refers to human affection or feelings. Therefore, if a person has *renqing*, he or she considers others' feelings. *Renqing* is based on the Confucian concept of reciprocity (Chen & Chen, 2004). If a person understands *renqing*, he or she would know how to behave appropriately in the interpersonal relationships according to *li*. *Renqing* can be expressed in a tangible form such gifts or in an intangible form like giving affective responses. When a person receives *renqing* from others, he or she needs to reciprocate (*bao*) the *renqing*. One of the interviewees, Ms A, perceived her manager gave her *renqing* in terms of cards and flowers (tangible) and his regards (intangible). To reciprocate her manager's *renqing*, she paid extra effort at work. As she put it, "*di shui zhi en, yong quan xiang bao*" (When one receives a small kindness from others, one should exert oneself to the utmost to pay the debt of gratitude.). Therefore, *renqing* is like cement which forms a mutual bond between two people. Without *renqing*, the relationship is distant and superficial, just like the relationship between Ms P (Section 5.2.2.1) and her manager, which became a reason for Ms P's resignation.

Following the Confucian and Taoist frameworks, one would be able to see why showing care to others is deemed to be an important quality of a competent manager by the Chinese employees. Given the importance of this quality and its positive effect on staff morale, managers may need to consider how they could nurture an intricate and involved relationship with their subordinates by showing *renqing*.

6.3.6 Trust in subordinates

When discussing the supervisor and supervisee relationship, the interviewees shared a view that trust from the management is important to them as it helps build their self-confidence. They (e.g. Ms A and Ms P, Section 5.2.2.2) claimed that without such trust, they felt anxious. To what extent do the Chinese conceptual frameworks help make sense of this?

If one follows the Confucian framework, the trust discussed by interviewees is related to the concept of *xin* (trust, trustworthiness), one of the five fundamental Confucian virtues (Section 3.3.1.3.5). Trustworthiness is a quality valued by Confucians. A trustworthy person is one who is faithful and can be relied on. When a person is not trusted by others, it means he or she is not regarded as trustworthy, which is deemed to be a denial of the person's capability of being an authoritative person. Therefore, the interviewees perceived trust from the management as a 'proof' for their trustworthiness, and such trust made them feel good about themselves and produced a positive sense of self. In order to reciprocate the trust from their managers, they would strive to do their work well.

When their managers asked too much, some interviewees (e.g. Mr F and Ms T, Section 5.2.2.2) interpreted that as distrust. They assumed when a manager closely monitors his or her subordinate's work, it suggests that the manager does not trust the subordinator could do the work well without his or her monitoring or close supervision. The manager's behaviour is against the Taoist teaching of "*wuwei er zhi*" (ruled in the manner of *wuwei*), which means giving a high degree of freedom to individuals to lead an independent life (Section 3.3.2.4). If one follows such teaching, one would respect the value of others and not impose one's own will upon others by interfering others' work too much. Instead, one would allow others time and autonomy to do their work.

Some expatriates might be puzzled by the Chinese employees' view that managers should show trust to their subordinates, even before the subordinates prove that they are trustworthy. They might think that it should be the other way round: the Chinese employees should prove that they are trustworthy and earn the trust from their managers.

It would be unreasonable to expect their managers to show trust in them before they could prove themselves trustworthy. To what extent could one argue that the employees' expectation is unreasonable? What are the grounds for their expectation? Could this be explained from a Chinese perspective? In the Chinese context, the emotional bonds or the social relationships between individuals serve as the foundation for trust. One earns the trust from others where there is no established relationship between them (i.e. strangers). For example, Yao (2002) discusses how trust is built between a Chinese trader and his customers. The trust gradually arises when the relationship is formed. However, if the relationship, one of the five cardinal relationships (*wulun*), has already been established, people tend to have some faith that the parties involved are trustworthy. For example, people tend to trust the people they know, such as their colleagues and friends, and incline to be sceptical in their encounters with a stranger.

The supervisor and supervisee relationship may be seen in light of the *wulun* (five cardinal relationships). As one of the five cardinal relationships, the supervisor and supervisee relationship acts as a 'solid' foundation for trust. Since there is a solid foundation, the subordinates expect their supervisors to show trust in them. Trust may be withdrawn only when there is evidence to show that they are untrustworthy. A Chinese saying captures this practice (or belief) well: "*yong ren wu yi, yi ren wu yong*" (If you choose a person for a job, do not doubt him or her. If you do not trust the person, do not choose him or her for the job.). That is why one of the interviewees, Ms A (Section 5.2.2.2), expressed that her pride and feeling were hurt when her expatriate manager did not show trust in her, since she did not do anything wrong and there was no reason for her manager to distrust her. As a consequence, this affected her work.

If one follows the Confucian framework, one may see why Chinese employees have an expectation on their managers showing trust in them. Nevertheless, it might not be realistic for the employees to ask for trust without proving that they are trustworthy. In fact, in practice, there is still a lack of trust outside the family (Redding, 1993). Therefore, even the relationship has already been established, Chinese might not always trust their friends or colleagues.

On one hand, it is evident that manager's trust in subordinates is perceived as important by the locals, managers might need to reflect on how such trust can be developed and how to demonstrate trust in their subordinates. On the other hand, the locals might need to adjust their expectation and earn the trust from their managers by proofing that they are trustworthy.

6.3.7 *Guanxi*: relationship with others

The findings suggest that the interviewees (e.g. Mr S and Ms U, Section 6.4.1.1) were aware of the importance of *guanxi* (relationships, connections), though they did not like the complication brought by *guanxi*.

Indeed, Chinese society is relation-based, in which the focus is not fixed on an individual, but on the relation between individuals who interact with each other (King & Bond, 1985). As King and Bond (1985) expressed, in the Chinese society, "man is a relational being. A relational being is sensitive to his relations with others, above, below, or on equal footing with him. He sees himself situated symbolically in the web of a relational network through which he defines himself." (p. 31). Therefore, without the relations, Chinese would find it difficult to define who they are.

If one studies the Chinese language, one would have a clearer picture of how important relations with others are to Chinese. The language has many finely-grained terms for different types of family relationships. For example, the term "uncle" in English can refer to a brother or brother-in-law of either parent, whereas Chinese has different terms for paternal uncles (*bo fu* and *shu fu*) and maternal uncles (*jiu fu*). Different terms are also used to reflect "*zhang you you xu*" (the proper order by age), which are closely related to the Confucian concept, *wulun*. For example, father's older brother is called *bo fu* and father's younger brother is called *shu fu*. Apparently, *guanxi* (relationships) is an essential notion in China.

While *guanxi* is important in China, many interviewees (e.g. Ms R and Ms U, Section 5.4.1.1) revealed that they were tired of the possible negative impacts of it. As some put it, not just expatriates but also Chinese (sometimes) find *guanxi* difficult to handle. In fact, they also suggested that many westerners could not fully appreciate the complexity of *guanxi* (relationships) in Chinese contexts. Why is that so? It is because in the Confucian framework, individuals' roles (including rights and obligations associated with the roles) and relationships are clearly described by *wulun* (the five cardinal relations). These detailed classifications contribute to the complexity of human relationships among Chinese. That could be the reason why expatriates, in the interviewees' v iew, only understand *guanxi* partially and some even have negative explanations of the notion; for example, misinterpreting it as a practice of bribery (Kidd, 2001).

As one of the interviewees, Ms T (Section 5 .4.1.1), suggested that *guanxi* is more complex than most expatriates realise. Yang (2002) argued that there is a difference between *guanxi* and bribery and she claims that the concept is more fundamental and far more complex:

> "*Guanxi* p laces much more emphasis on *renqing* (human sentiment or human emotion) and the long-term obligations and bond of the relationship than the material interest exchanged, whereas in bribery and corruption, the social relationship is a means, not an end, of the exchange." (p. 465)

When building up *guanxi*, individuals may give *renqing* to others; when in difficult times, they can expect others legitimately to return this *renqing*. From the Confucian perspective, this, in fact, is acting in accordance with *ren* (authoritative conduct) and *li* (ritual propriety). Then, why is it so often that when western businessmen, even some Chinese businessmen, cope with *guanxi*, they 'contribute' to the 'air' of bribery? It is because they do it without *yi* (appropriateness). For example, as Yang argues, when one uses the social relationship as a means of getting advantages instead of emphasising the long-term obligation, this behaviour would be, from the Confucian perspective, interpreted as inappropriate. This may explain why some expatriates misinterpret *guanxi* as a practice of bribery.

Being aware of the importance of *guanxi* among Chinese and the possible negative impacts of it when it is practised inappropriately, the challenge yet to face managers perhaps is how they could cultivate *guanxi* appropriately within, as well as outside, the organisation.

6.4 Summary

This chapter first interpreted the seven prominent themes that emerged from the interview data through the notion of self in the frameworks of Giddens, Taylor, and Ricoeur; then the seven themes were read through the notion in the Confucian and Taoist frameworks.

While Giddens', Taylor's, and Ricoeur's frameworks may help make sense of the interviewees' views on these themes, certain aspects like the non-confrontational attitude in handling disagreement and the complexity of the issue of face remain puzzling.

The Confucian and Taoist frameworks on the other hand help explain the views of the interviewees though it also shows that some of the interviewees' attitude, such as their weariness of complicated personal relationships, may not neatly fit into the Chinese tradition.

This may suggest that instead of interpreting the Chinese voice solely from either a western perspective or Chinese perspective, a comprehensive understanding may be achieved when the two perspectives are brought together. With a dialogue between the two, the horizons of the researcher can then be expanded, as encouraged by Gadamer (Section 4.3.2), and thus a new understanding could be reached of the phenomenon under study.

Table 6.1 Interpretation from western conceptual frameworks

Themes / Findings	Giddens' framework	Taylor's framework	Ricoeur's framework
Job development opportunities			
• development is important	• the concept of self-reflexivity is a process for individuals to grow	• the real growth of the self is a journey that individuals grow from an average condition towards committing to the hypergoods	• the growth of selfhood is when individuals can take moral action sharing others' suffering and showing sympathy
• managers need to take an active role in their subordinates' development	• does not support • individuals should be responsible for their own growth	• no discussion	• no discussion
Fairness			
• fairness is important (fairness and justice are used interchangeably)	• no significant discussion on justice • excising fairness or not is individuals' life choice	• one of the hypergoods discussed is benevolence, which calls upon individuals to care for justice • essence of universal justice is equality and respect	• justice is essential for individuals to live a good life • justice calls for equality and care
Harmonious workplace			
• harmony is important	• no discussion on the notion • nearest concept is the notion of coherence, but it is about intrapersonal not interpersonal relationship	• no discussion on the notion • no indication that harmony would be valued	• no discussion on the notion • the discussion on the aim of a good life as living well with and for others suggests that 'harmony' would be valued
• diplomatic actions employed to maintain harmony	• no discussion	• no discussion	• no discussion
Mutual respect			
• showing respect to others is important	• does not support • the discussion on "pure relationships" suggests that others are instrumental to individuals' formation of self • showing respect to others or not is individuals' life choice	• one of the hypergoods discussed emphasises equal respect for all human beings • showing respect to others is a moral obligation	• showing respect to others is a 'prerequisite' for individuals to gain self-esteem and self-respect
• protecting others' face as a way to show respect	• no discussion on the notion of face	• no discussion on the notion of face	• no discussion on the notion of face

Themes / Findings	Giddens' framework	Taylor's framework	Ricoeur's framework
Care and concern			
• showing care and concern to others is important	• does not support • others are instrumental • showing care to others or not is individuals' life choice	• "benevolence", one of the hypergoods, calls upon individuals to care for the well-being of others	• moral obligation for individuals to show concern to others and have empathy for them
Trust			
• trust from managers is a source for self-confidence	• does not support • trust that engenders self-confidence comes from individuals themselves	• no discussion on the notion of trust	• no discussion on the notion of trust
• managers should trust their subordinates unless there is evidence to show that they are untrustworthy	• does not support • trust needs to be won and cannot be taken as given	• no discussion on this	• does not support • individuals need to prove that they are trustworthy by keeping their words
Relationship with others			
• relationships with others are important	• relationships are of elementary importance for the reflexive project of the self • relationships are formed by individuals' choice based on their personal needs or pleasure	• relationships with others are important for individuals' formation of self • limited discussion on the role that others play in individuals' life	• relationships with others are important as individuals' sense of self is embedded with their relations with others • individuals have a mutual and reciprocal relationship with other people • three types of others are discussed

Table 6.2 Interpretation from Chinese conceptual frameworks

Themes / Findings	Confucian framework	Taoist framework
Job development opportunities		
• development is important	• development is a life-long process	• development is important but should not be sought intentionally
• managers need to take an active role in their subordinates' development	• according to *wulun* (the five cardinal relations), subordinates are expected to demonstrate their respect for their managers, and managers in turn are expected to take care of the welfare of their subordinates • according to *ren* (authoritative conduct), it is an ethical obligation for individuals to help others achieve advancement	• does not support • according to *wuwei* (non-assertive action), the supervisor should not 'interfere' with the subordinate too much
Fairness		
• fairness is important (fairness and justice are used interchangeably)	• there is a concept of equality • everyone was born with equal 'heavenly nature', intrinsic goodness • the supervisor is expected to be unbiased in handling his/her duties	• since everything in the world is created by *dao* (way), there is no distinction between being noble and humble for mankind • without prejudice or preference, individuals should be able to treat others impartially
Harmonious workplace		
• harmony is important	• achieving a harmonious society is the foremost moral goal • with *de* (ethics) individuals can lead a distinctive human life living in harmony with others	• individuals are encouraged to follow *dao* (the way of Heaven) • when individuals follow *dao*, they will live in harmony with everything in nature
• diplomatic actions employed to maintain harmony	• individuals are encouraged to *keji* (restrain the self); therefore, individuals may suppress their ideas to avoid conflicts • the notion of *ren* requires individuals to take others into consideration; therefore, individuals tend to consider the interest and the need of the group more than their own • according to *yi* (appropriateness) and *li* (ritual propriety), individuals should show respect to their supervisors and defy their supervisors in public would be regarded as inappropriate • individuals are encouraged to reserve differences without coming into conflicts as far as possible	• individuals are encouraged to let go of themselves (*wuwo*— selfless); when individuals forgets about their selves, they can then harmonise themselves with nature • according to *wuwei* (non-assertive action), individuals should observe the environment and wait for the right moment to take action

Themes / Findings	Confucian framework	Taoist framework
Mutual respect		
• showing respect to others is important	• as everyone is endowed with innate virtues, they deserve respect	• as everything has the same origin, all things (including human beings) deserve equal respect
• protecting others' face as a way to show respect	• *ren* calls on individuals to consider others requiring them not to embarrass others in public	• no such concept as the framework focuses on the relationship with nature
Care and concern		
• showing care and concern to others is important	• in the reciprocal supervisor and supervisee relationship, according to *li*, subordinates are expected to show their respect for their managers; managers in turn are expected to express their care and concern for the subordinates • supervisors are encouraged to convince their subordinates with *de* (ethics), such as showing care and concern to the subordinates	• the concept of *ci* emphasises the spontaneous nature of benevolence in a reciprocal relationship
Trust		
• trust from managers is a source for self-confidence	• *xin* (trust, trustworthiness) is one of the five fundamental Confucian virtues; being trusted by the manager proves that the subordinate is trustworthy	• no such concept as the framework focuses on the relationship with nature
• managers should trust their subordinates unless there is evidence to show that they are untrustworthy	• the supervisor and supervisee relationship is one of *wulun* (five cardinal relationships), which is a solid foundation for trust	• the supervisor should adopt an approach of *wuwei er zhi* (ruled in the manner of *wuwei*) and should not closely monitor the subordinate's work, which implies a sense of freedom
Relationship with others		
• relationships with others are important	• individuals' roles (including rights and obligations) are discussed in *wulun* • the detailed discussion of *wulun* indicates the importance of human relationships, which shows that human society is the central concern	• is concerned about the relationship with nature, rather than human beings

Chapter 7: Theoretical Dialogues—The Self, The Other

7.1 Introduction

Business and management research has long been dominated by western conceptual frameworks (Jack & Westwood, 2006; Westwood, 2001) and non-western research subjects are often studied and interpreted from a western perspective. In view of this, postcolonial theory was introduced to allow space for the non-western other, the marginalised one, to "speak back" as an equal partner to the dominant and in so doing an alternative to the dominant western way of thinking is produced.

To understand the research subject, Chinese employees who worked in multinational corporations, the notion of self was scrutinised in Chapter 3. The notion of self was first discussed from a western perspective examining the frameworks of Giddens (1991), Taylor (1989), and Ricoeur (1992), and the notion was then discussed from a Chinese perspective mainly through two Chinese philosophical traditions: the Confucian framework and the Taoist framework.

In Chapter 5, the "voice those at the receiving end", the Chinese employees, was introduced. The 'voice' was first interpreted through the frameworks of the three western scholars and then through the Chinese frameworks in Chapter 6. Up to this point, the discussion has been presented separately: one from a western perspective and one from a Chinese perspective. After having some 'monologues', it is time to bring the two sides together. By engaging them into dialogue, one may be able to see what the common focal points of interest and shared concerns are, what is absent in one which is found in the other, and what is crucial to one but less important to the other. Such knowledge may help both sides understand each other better, and shed some light on understanding Chinese employees, the research subject.

7.2 Conventional dialogues

Following the academic convention, the dialogues below are led by the western scholars examining the key notions in their frameworks and how these notions are understood in the Chinese frameworks.

7.2.1 From Giddens to the Chinese

Anthony Giddens was the first scholar engaged in Chapter 3 for the discussion on the notion of self. Giddens argues that the coherent self is the sole resource for the formation of the self without locating itself within a framework of values. He also has limited discussion on the relation with others. It was then concluded in the chapter that Giddens' framework is insufficient for understanding the research subject, Chinese employees. To further understand what causes the insufficiency, the key concepts in Giddens' framework are assessed below in the light of the Chinese frameworks (see Table 7.1, p. 250).

7.2.1.1 The self in a chaotic time

Giddens', Confucian and Taoist frameworks all started with an aim to provide a solution to a similar problem—changes caused by the chaotic situation at the time. However, the solutions provided to restore stability are different.

Giddens describes the modern world as a "runaway world" as it is fast changing: traditional systems have collapsed; new information and ideas emerge quickly. This dynamism of modernity could be problematic as it may cause chaos. Giddens argues that the social order based firmly in tradition that once defined individuals' sense of self is no longer available in modern society. He sees that as the wider contexts—such as societies, institutions, or systems—are not able to provide answers to individuals, then individuals should turn to themselves for answers to the possible challenges, like insecurity, brought by modernity's dynamism (Section 3.2.1.1).

As individuals are no longer bound by customs and traditions, they are free to make choices throughout their lives. Giddens celebrates this freedom that individuals have in making their own choices to create and re-create themselves, though he also admits that this freedom brings pressure. Through making on-going conscious choices in their life, individuals construct who they are; forming a coherent sense of self. This coherent sense of self is crucial for individuals to establish an "inner authenticity", and this "inner authenticity" is regarded by Giddens as "a framework of basic trust by means of which the lifespan can be understood as a unity against the backdrop of shifting social events" (1991, p. 215). Therefore, the coherent sense of self becomes the source for individuals' "ontological security", which was once built on the regulations and practices embedded in tradition.

What about Confucius? What was his solution for the problem caused by the chaotic time when he was born? Confucius was born in the Spring and Autumn Period (722 BC–476 BC), during which ancient China was ruled by a feudal system. As the era unfolded, the social order started to collapse; smaller states were taken over by larger ones. The feudal system fell apart, as did the regulations and practices that went with the system. However, unlike Giddens, Confucius did not simply turn inward for the solutions to the problems resulting from the breakdown of the feudal system. Instead, he advocated correctness of social relationships, as well as personal morality, when handling the challenges brought by the chaotic situation in his time.

It seems that Confucius attributed the chaos to the violation of the code for social relationships with others. For instance, feudal lords needed to show their loyalty to the emperor and a feudal state had the moral obligation not to invade other feudal states.

Perceiving that the problems were caused by 'incorrect social relationships' and immoral practice, Confucius promoted the teaching of, for example, *ren* (authoritative conduct)—an attribute that requires individuals to enrich or enlarge others, *li* (ritual propriety)—norms of social interaction, and *yi* (appropriateness)—an ethical standard or judgement (Section 3.3.1).

While Giddens views that individuals can be the source of their own ontological security, Confucius saw that the social order needed to be restored before individuals could enjoy such security. Therefore, he emphasised correctness of social relationships—the relationship between the self and others. He believed when everyone is behaving in a proper way: "*Jun jun, chen chen, fu fu, zi zi*" (Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son) (*Lunyu*, 7:11; in Lau, 2001, p. 113), people would then be able to enjoy a stable and peaceful life. This could be why how to act properly according to one's role is a key theme in Confucius' teaching.

What about Laozi? Laozi also lived in a chaotic time where the old system crumbled. Historians contend that Laozi lived in the 4th century BC, concurrent with the Warring States Period (475 BC–221 BC), though it was traditionally regarded that Laozi lived in the 6th century BC. No matter whether Laozi lived in the Spring and Autumn Period or the Warring States Period, China at his time was in a chaotic situation. To provide answers to problems caused by the disorder from the collapse of the institutions, Laozi advocated *ziran* (naturalness, spontaneity) and *wuwei* (non-assertive action) (Section 3.3.2.4).

Laozi attributed the disorder in his time to the excessive desires of people, especially the political leaders. He believed that if individuals could get rid of their desire, the world would be at peace of its own accord. As excessive desire is a violation of the pattern of *ziran* (nature); to get rid of the desire, individuals need to practice *wuwei* which entails simplicity and tranquillity keeping excessive desire at bay. Therefore, unlike Confucius, Laozi did not attempt to seek answers in social relationship with others by urging individuals to sedulously follow the 'man-made' code for social relationship. He opposed the Confucian artificial effort to "correct" or "improve" the pattern of nature, which would only alienate individuals from their innate virtue. He regarded that virtue, like *ren* (authoritative conduct), should be the 'end-product' when individuals follow *ziran* but should not be used as tools to interfere with the order of nature. Nor did he believe that the solution lies within individuals themselves, just like what Giddens seems to propose. On the contrary, he advocated *wuwo* (no self, no I). Instead of focusing on individual themselves, he suggested individuals should let go of themselves and 'listen' to nature and follow the patterns of nature.

7.2.1.2 A coherent self and reflexivity

In Section 7.2.1.1, it was discussed that in Giddens' framework, the coherent sense of self, instead of traditional systems, becomes the source for individuals' "ontological security". To create a coherent sense of self, Giddens believes that the self needs to do a lot of reflection during its life time. Individuals reflect on what lifestyle choices they need to make in their day-to-day activities. Therefore, he sees that the self is a reflexive project in which individuals make sense of who they are. Through reflexive activities, individuals create ordered stories of the self—the "narrative of self" (Section 3.2.1.2). With a coherent narrative, individuals can then have a coherent sense of self.

Despite the fact that some scholars (e.g. Adams, 2003; Alexander, 1996) regard reflexivity as being shaped by the constraints of culture, Giddens' reflexivity 'frees' individuals from culture. For Giddens, an individual's self is 'self-sufficient'; it does not need to consider culture or tradition nor rely on others to support or help in constructing their self. He believes individuals are free agents to create whoever they want to be, and there is no emphasis on social or moral obligations in the creation of the self. It seems that, for Giddens, the only criterion for individuals' selection is to reflexively make the choice that helps create an ordered pattern in their life, and subsequently a coherent sense of self. If Giddens' framework is followed, one just wonders what kind of world it would be.

While Giddens' self needs to do a lot of reflection during its life time, the Confucian framework also advocates individuals establishing a habit of reflection. Zengzi, a disciple of Confucius, once said, "*Wu ri san sheng we shen.*" (Every day I examine myself on three accounts) (*Lunyu*, 1:4; in Zheng, 2007, p. 15). Unlike Giddens' reflexive self whose interest is in the choice of its own life style, Zengzi's focus in his introspection was on his concern for others: had he been sincere (*zhong*) when acting on behalf of others, had he been trustworthy (*xin*) when dealing with friends, and had he practised what was taught by Confucius, his teacher? Both *zhong* (sincerity) and *xin* (trustworthiness) are the virtues that one should manifest in one's relationship with others.

What about the Taoist framework? The Taoist framework does not explicitly discussed reflection. But if Taoists do reflect on their life, the focus of Taoists in their reflection would probably be very different from that of Confucians. Laozi was concerned more the way of heaven than the human way, and advised individuals to let go of their ego and follow the natural rhythms and patterns of nature so as to live in harmony with *wanwu* (ten thousand things in nature) (Section 3.3.2.1). Therefore, Taoists probably would not focus too much on their relations with other people, but would be more concerned about whether the patterns of nature are understood and followed.

Compared to Giddens, Confucians and Taoists take a completely different view of the foundation for individuals' choices when they act, which is not self-referential, as suggested in Giddens' framework. Both Confucians and Taoists believe the choices that individuals make call for their living up to *dao* (the way) that serves as a guide in an ideal life. If the aim of the reflexive project of the self in Giddens' framework is to maintain a coherent pattern in individuals' life; living according to *dao* would be the aim of the reflexive activities in both the Confucian and Taoist frameworks.

However, Confucians and Taoists have different perceptions on how one should live according to *dao*. Both Confucians and Taoists believe *tian* (heaven) created everything and naturally the way (*dao*) of heaven exists in humans (sections 3.3.1.1 and 3.3.2.1). It is, however, up to individuals to manifest the way in their life. When individuals choose to act in accord with *dao*, they will become a sage, and an ideal moral person, in the Confucian framework and become a *zhen ren* (a real or true person), or the enlightened person in the Taoist framework. Despite that, Confucians and Taoists hold quite different views on how *dao* could be manifested. In the Confucian framework, the manifestation of *dao* requires individuals to 'choose' to show respect for other people over self autonomy or indulgence which seems to be encouraged in Giddens' framework. Although Taoists would agree with Confucians that individuals should not have self indulgence, they advocate a 'higher' virtue that goes beyond respect for other people, which is respect for nature. Therefore, Confucians are concerned about the immediate social life, whereas Taoists emphasise a life that harmonises with nature.

For Giddens, creating a coherent narrative of the self, and subsequently a coherent sense of self, is all it matters in an individual's life. This may suggest that Giddens regards an individual as a unit and it is important to maintain the unity by getting coherent stories of the self resulting from individuals constantly interrogating the past, present and future. Both Confucius and Laozi, however, did not discuss coherence. A 'close' concept that may be compared to Giddens' "coherence" is the concept of "harmony" that Confucius and Laozi advocated. Confucius' concern of harmony may imply that he considered an individual has to include others to become a unit, not an individual by himself or herself can be a unit, and harmony in a group maintains that unity. As for Laozi, harmony with nature is important, and he believed individuals could not separate themselves from nature; an interconnected, organic whole. It seems that Giddens' concern is an individuals' being consisting of their lifestyle choices, and this may lead to that individual insisting on their personal principles when making choices; whereas following Confucius', as well as Laozi's, concern of harmony, individuals may be more ready to compromise by sacrificing individual ideas or preferences for the benefits of others.

Giddens' reflexive project is considered as a lifetime project wherein individuals continuously reflect on their daily activities striving to constitute a coherent sense of self. A similar on-going process in forming the self could also be found in the Confucian framework. Confucians perceive that individuals are engaged in a life-long process to cultivate themselves so that they would be able to become one with the sage. Yao's (1996) discussion on the philosophical characters of the self explains Confucian concepts of self-cultivation. Yao refers *si* (I), a philosophical character, "the internal qualities or private characters or what is private to oneself" (p. 3). He states that only by containing or controlling *si* can one's true self be manifested. He further points out that manifesting one's true self means 'the public interests are given priority over the selfish interests' (p. 3). It seems that this is the opposite of what Giddens is advocated in his framework, as in the latter there is no value judgement in individuals' choice of life style. A Confucians' task of self-cultivation is to fulfil individuals' role as a moral agent, while the aim of individuals in Giddens' framework seems to be no more than self-interest seeking.

What about the Taoist framework? The Taoist concept of *wuwei* seems to suggest that Taoists discourage self-cultivation. In fact, Laozi was not against individuals seeking for growth, but believed individuals' growth would come spontaneously without individuals seeking development sedulously. However, he would probably disagree with Confucians that the aim of self-cultivation is to fulfil the individual's role as a moral agent, but would advocate that aligning themselves with *dao* should be the aim of individuals' growth. His idea of *wuwo* (no self) also distinguishes him from Giddens as self-interest would not be characteristic of the growth that Taoists would prefer.

7.2.1.3 Autonomy and the other

In Giddens' framework, culture and tradition lose their salience for defining individuals' identity. Without culture and tradition to give meaning to individuals, autonomy and control are now opened up to individuals. As discussed in the previous session, the liberated individuals that Giddens celebrates put desire and self autonomy above other people. As an individual's relationship with others is no longer bound by social or moral obligations, they can freely define their relations based on personal needs (Section 3.2.1.3). For example, Giddens discusses the development of "plastic sexuality" in which individuals enjoy open sexual relations satisfying personal pleasure. This plasticity of sexuality reveals that Giddens' reflexive self chooses self indulgence over care and respect for the other. In other words, there may not be a place for the other in an individual's consideration in the formation of the self. Giddens does not emphasise the importance of the other in the creation of the self. He believes that the self exists more or less autonomously from the other. There is not much place for others to play in an individual's life. He thinks that individuals are self-sufficient. Giddens seems to suggest that individuals have a 'vacant' place—with no reference to anything—where they are free from, for example, moral or social obligations, when constructing who they are. But the question is: Can this place really exist? Even Giddens denies or minimises the external influence from culture, tradition or others, it would be difficult to think how individuals could construct who they are without considering their moral or social obligations. Is reflexivity merely a matter of choice? In fact, being able to reflect is being able to see one's self from the eyes of others. Interestingly, though Giddens sees that individuals have the control on how they construct their selves, he thinks that individuals may need the help from experts, such as psychologists, for maintaining a coherent lifespan. This seems to be contradicting his autonomous self.

If we put Giddens' idea of autonomous self in the Confucian framework, it may be regarded as *xiaoren* (a mean-spirited person). According to Confucians, "*Junzi yu yu yi, xiaoren yu yu li*" (A virtuous person pursues appropriateness, whereas a mean-spirited person pursues self benefits) (*Lunyu*, 6:16; in Zheng, 2007, p. 89). As discussed previously, Giddens opines that individuals have autonomy in constructing who they are, and the only consideration in the formation of the self is to maintain a coherent narrative when making lifestyle choices. This seems that individuals are encouraged to put self interest higher than any other things, which is the behaviour of *xiaoren*. Confucian teaching encourages individuals to seek to be *junzi* (a virtuous person) and disapproves the behaviour of *xiaoren*. So, does it mean that the Confucian framework condemns autonomy and favours being bound by prescribed virtues, like ritual propriety (*li*)? Liu (2004) argues that this would be true "if *li* was arbitrarily made and enforced" (p. 367). He suggests that individuals can in fact exercise their autonomy when they become "*li*-makers". The prerequisite of being a "*li*-maker" is the ability to understand *dao* (the way) as Confucius claimed that *li* is established on and in harmony with *dao*. According to Confucius, only a sage has the ability to fully understand *dao*, and everyone can be a sage. As mentioned previously, Confucius contended that *tian* (heaven) created everything, including humans, and everyone was born with an infinite *xin* (heart-mind). When individuals choose to fully develop their heart-minds, they can become a sage. Being a sage, individuals can understand *dao* and coexist with the *tian di* (heaven and earth) (Section 3.3.1.1). Having said that, it is important to point out that though everyone has a heart-mind, it takes time for an individual to fully realise and cultivate it to maturity so as to understand *dao*. As Confucius once said,

> "From fifteen, my *xin* (heart-mind) was set on learning; from thirty I took my stance; from forty I was no longer doubtful; from fifty I realized *tian ming* (the propensities of *tian*); from sixty my ear was attuned; from seventy I could give my heart-mind free rein without overstepping the boundaries" (*Lunyu*, 2:4; in Zheng, 2007, p. 24)

Even for Confucius, only when he was seventy could he then fully exercise his autonomy. That is why Wong (2004) suggests that "for the Confucians, autonomy is an ethical achievement" (p. 426).

As for the Taoist framework, respect for individual autonomy is one of its characteristics. As discussed before, Taoists see that *dao* creates everything in nature, and people are part of nature and are invested with *de* that empowers them to conform to the way in which *dao* operates. Since Taoists believe people are born with *de*—therefore, unlike what Confucians suggest—there is no need for having a pre-set attitude toward social responsibility; individuals are given the freedom to manifest *de* by adopting a *wuwei* manner (Section 3.3.2.3). In Laozi's view, rulers should *wuwei er zhi* (rule following the manner of *wuwei*) allowing individuals maximum autonomy and people will realise it is their responsibility for their own well-being (Section 3.3.2.4).

While the self in the Confucian framework enjoys autonomy as Giddens' reflexive self does, the other probably plays a more important role in the formation of the self according to the Confucian framework than in Giddens' framework. As discussed previously, others do not have a place in the formation of Giddens' reflexive self. However, the existence of others or, more precisely, the relationship with others is crucial for the formation of the self in the Confucian framework. Tu (1985a), King and Bond (1985) and Liang (1987) all support that the Confucian self emerges only in a network of human relations and the interactions with others help individuals define who they are. This is evident when scrutinising the Confucian framework. To illustrate this, let us briefly recap the Five Constant Virtues, the core concepts in Confucian teaching, discussed in Chapter 4. The Five Constant Virtues consist of *ren* (authoritative conduct), *yi* (appropriateness), *li* (ritual propriety), *zhi* (wisdom) and *xin* (trustworthiness). The central ethical interest of *ren* is the love and care that individuals show others and their affectionate concern for the well-being of others. The focus of *yi* is on what is right or appropriate for individuals' social roles or their relations with others. *Li* focuses on the ritual codes which help individuals know how to act appropriately in their relationships with others. *Zhi* is the wisdom to know or to understand lived human relationships. *Xin* is a virtue primarily governing the relationship between friends but is later expanded to be regarded as a proper fulfilment of one's duties to others. Indeed, all five virtues are related to the relationship with others. One may argue that others are important in the formation of the self in the Confucian framework.

There is no explicit discussion to show that the other gains more respect in the Taoist framework than that in Giddens' framework. Based on Giddens' discussion on pure relations, one may suspect that the other is more or less disposable in his framework. If the other is disposable, then it is unlikely that the other will be respected. In the Taoist framework, however, as Taoists believe everything is created by *dao*, all the things should enjoy equal status. This is a basis for respect for others.

The dialogue between Giddens and the Chinese intellectual frameworks reveals that though there are some similarities that they may share, there are many differences between them. All the three frameworks started with an aim to provide a solution to the problem brought by a chaotic time, but the solutions they provided are different. Giddens encourages individuals to turn inward to themselves for the answer to the problem, and he sees that individuals are self-sufficient for solving the problem; whereas Confucians and Taoists believe the other plays an important role in solving the problem. For Confucians, the other is referred to other human beings; therefore, they emphasise correct social relationships with other people is the key to the solution of the problem. As for Taoists, the other means other beings, not just human beings; therefore, they focus on a harmonious relationship with nature. This suggests that if the Chinese research subject is read through Giddens' framework, there would be considerable misinterpretation on the behaviour of the research subject and some might be overlooked.

7.2.2 From Taylor to the Chinese

The framework of Charles Taylor was introduced when Giddens' framework was suspected to be insufficient for interpreting the Chinese research subject. As in the Chinese context, it is commonly perceived that the moral aspect, as well as the relation with others, is very important in understanding a person's self, Taylor's framework was considered Chapter 3 for its suitability to interpret the Chinese research subject. It was found that while morality has a central place in Taylor's framework, the importance of the relation with others is not explicitly discussed in the framework. It was then concluded that while Taylor's framework could help interpret the Chinese research subject in a certain degree, it seems that the framework is still inadequate for understanding the research subject. In the following session, to further understand the strengthens and weaknesses of the framework as a conceptual lens in this research, the key notions in Taylor's framework are assessed in the light of the Chinese frameworks (see Table 7.2, p.251).

7.2.2.1 Moral frameworks

There are two key concepts in Taylor's discussion of morality, namely moral frameworks and hypergoods. As discussed in Section 3.2.2.1, Taylor believes that to make sense of their selves, individuals need to find a place in the moral space by having frameworks for evaluating their lives. He argues that the understanding of self is deeply intertwined with an individual's understanding of the good. To determine what is good or valuable and what is not, individuals need a moral framework. To find this framework, individuals need to know where they stand in the moral space. When they know where they themselves stand, they could then explain who they are and justify why they respond to the world in the way that they do. In other words, an individual's identity is tied up with the values that give direction to his or her life.

Confucius shared a similar view. Although it is not made explicit in *Lunyu*—the analects of Confucius—that individuals cannot define their selves in the absent of values, it is not difficult to see that Confucius put a strong emphasis on personal morality in which the Five Constant Virtues: *ren* (authoritative conduct), *yi* (appropriateness), *li* (ritual propriety), *zhi* (wisdom) and *xin* (trustworthiness) are the core values (Section 3.3.1.3). Like Taylor, Confucius' teachings imply that the self emerges from within the context of a moral framework.

What about the Taoist framework? As discussed in Section 7.2.1.1, Taoists disagree with the effort that Confucians pay to manifest virtues, and argue that this artificial effort to "correct" or "improve" the pattern of nature would only alienate individuals from their innate virtue. They believe virtues, like *ren* (authoritative conduct), should be the 'end-product'. When individuals follow the pattern of nature (*ziran*), these virtues would be manifested. Although Taoists oppose the Confucian deliberate effort in attaining virtues, they still value morality.

When Taylor argues that for individuals to make sense of who they are, they need to position themselves in the moral space as the orientation in their life. This seems to suggest that individuals are 'free' to choose any moral framework that they feel is appropriate, though Taylor acknowledges that an individual's choice for their moral framework may be bound by the society or the culture that they are in. In *Sources of the Self* (1989), Taylor mentions a number of possible 'candidates', such as Christianity and Plato's idea of the Good, as individuals' moral framework.

Confucians or Taoists, however, do not discuss any alternative moral frameworks as Taylor does. It seems Confucians or Taoists do not see that there is an alternative framework other than *dao* (the way). As previously mentioned, Confucians or Taoists believe when individuals understand *dao* and act in accordance with it, they will be able to live an ideal life (Section 7.2.1.2). For Confucians, the ideal life means a moral life that ensures a harmonious relationship among the members of the society, whereas for Taoists, the ideal life means living in harmony with nature. If for Taylor, the Confucian or Taoist idea of *dao* could be understood as another option of moral framework, like Christianity or Plato's idea of the Good, for Confucians or Taoists, *dao* realised through *de* (virtue) is the *only* framework.

There is another difference between Taylor's idea of moral framework and Confucian or Taoist concept of moral framework, *dao*. Both Confucians and Taoists believe that everyone possesses *dao*, as they were created by *tian* through *dao*. Therefore, to find the moral framework, what individuals need to do is to understand *dao*. Confucians and Taoists may not think that individuals have a choice, in choosing the moral framework as Taylor suggests; however, they see that individuals are free to choose to manifest *dao* or not. Although, *dao* realised through *de* is the only moral framework, individuals can choose to follow *dao* or not. For Confucians, when one follows *dao*, one would be *junzi* (a virtuous person); if one goes against *dao*, one would be *xiaoren* (a mean-spirited person) (Section 3.3.1.1).

7.2.2.2 Hypergoods

Taylor coined the term hypergoods in his discussion on life goods. It is not easily translated in a conventional term. What he means is the higher-ordered life goods—goods that are more important than others and serves as "the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about" (1989, p. 63). These hypergoods, together with the related life goods, made up the moral framework that helps individuals create their selves (Section 3.2.2.2).

Three main hypergoods could be found in Taylor's discussion. The first is benevolence, which calls upon individuals to care for justice and the well-being of others. Taylor suggests that this hypergood is accepted by many as their highest good and he refers to it as the universal ethic. Indeed, a similar concept is found in the Confucian framework. *Ren* (authoritative conduct), one of the Five Constant Virtues, is commonly translated as 'benevolence'. The central ethical interest of *ren* is the love and care that individuals show others and their affectionate concern for the well-being of others (Section 3.3.1.3.4).

A similar concept is also found in the Taoist framework. *Ci* (compassion) is one of the three treasures that help individuals harmonize with *dao*. Taoists think that *ci* is different from the Confucian *ren*, as *ren* in a virtue that individuals need deliberate effort to manifest, whereas *ci* is a spontaneous kindness just like a parent's tender love to her child, which is natural (Section 3.3.2.2).

The second hypergood that Taylor traces is equal respect for all human beings regardless of their race, sex, religions, and so on. Taylor indicates that the principle of equal respect is found in the challenge of hierarchical conceptions of society in early modern times and the negation of the patriarchal social system nowadays changing the relations between the sexes. If one follows a conventional interpretation, one may interpret that instead of showing equal respect for all human beings, Chinese advocate inequality, as the Confucian system of thinking promotes *wulun* (the five cardinal relations), which may be seen as encouraging hierarchical relations, at least in the eyes of westerners. Under *wulun*, some (e.g. father, husband and elder brother) seem to enjoy more authority and privileges than others (e.g. son, wife and younger brother). Some may argue that this view towards relations nurtures inequality. However, the focus of *wulun* is on the rights as well as obligations associated with different social roles rather than emphasising the authority that one group has over another. For Confucius, without *jing*, *li* is meaningless (Section 3.3.1.3.3). Therefore, only when individuals respect the worth of others, can they really act according to *li*. When individuals act according to *li* (ritual propriety) in their relations with others and treat others appropriately (*yi*) and with *ren* (authoritative conduct), then others would be well treated. This perhaps is the respect that Confucians believe individuals should show to others. Besides, Confucians believe *tian* (Heaven) created everything, including humans, and everyone was born with equal 'heavenly nature', intrinsic goodness (Section 3.3.1.1). Given this, Confucians advocate that everyone, even *xiaoren* (a mean-spirited p erson) deserves respect. There is one example that helps illustrate that how Confucians value equality. Confucius once said, "*you jiao wu lei*" (Education is for all without discrimination) (*Lunyu*, 15:39; in Zheng, 2007, p. 247). Confucius believed that as everyone has ability to become *junzi* (a virtuous person); therefore, he proposed that education should be provided to everyone to help them develop and cultivate their character.

Like the Confucian framework, the Taoist framework also does not include any discussion on equal respect for all human beings. However, the concepts of *yin* and *yang* encourage individuals to respect others regardless of who they are (Section 3.3.3.2). Taoists believe one may be weak (*yin*) in certain aspects, but could be strong (*yang*) in other aspects. Holding this view, individuals could find it easier to show respect to those who seem to be weak and inferior to them.

The third hypergood that Taylor discusses in his framework is autonomy, which he refers to as self-determining freedom. Such freedom allows individuals to create their unique selves freely, which seems to be similar to the autonomy discussed in Giddens' framework. However, as morality has a central place in Taylor's framework, it is suspected that, unlike Giddens, Taylor would not agree that to maintain one's autonomy, one could forgo one's social and moral obligations. Some people may argue that the Confucian framework ignores the autonomy of the self as the self is always conformed to *li* (ritual propriety). However, as discussed in Section 7.2.1.3, Wong (2004) suggests that autonomy is an ethical achievement for Confucians. For individuals to enjoy their autonomy, Confucians sees that manifesting the virtues of, such as, *ren*, *yi* and *li* is the prerequisite. When individuals' *xin* (heart-mind) understand these, they can then free their *xin* and do whatever pleases them without worrying that they would overstepping the boundaries, as even they follow their heart-mind, they would not act in a way that violates the virtues.

As for Taoists, individuals' autonomy is highly respected as the Taoist framework advocates "*wuwei er zhi*" (rule in the manner of *wuwei*) which encourages the ruler to give a high degree of freedom to individuals to lead a simple and independent life. When people are allowed to live in a way that follows the pattern of nature, harmony would be achieved without effort (Section 3.3.2.4).

7.2.2.3 Importance of the other

It is evident that Taylor sees others as important for individuals' formation of self. He suggests that the self exists among other selves, as an individual can never be described without reference to those who surround him or her and the individual needs to be engaged with others in interlocutions to constitute the individual's self (Section 3.2.2.3). The act of articulation is to formulate what individuals hold as important and their moral reactions. Articulation gives them a reflexive picture of life and helps them evaluate the goods they hold, which in turn confirms the moral space that individuals stand in.

Others not only serve as references for what one stands for in a society or as audiences to one's narrative, they are also the receivers of one's moral actions. For example, among the three hypergoods that Taylor discusses, two of them require the existence of others. Benevolence calls upon individuals to care for the well-being of others. Without the presence of others, to whom individuals could show their benevolence? As for the hypergood that encourages equal respect for all human beings, apparently the presence of others is required so that there would be someone to be treated equally. When individuals manifest these hypergoods, they do not blindly obey the abstract rules only but respond to some concrete people.

Similarly, others play a very important role in helping individuals to establish their selves in the Confucian framework. In their concerns for others, individuals define who they are. For Confucians, an individual's self reaches its maturity when the individual becomes a sage (Section 3.3.1.1). During this journey to sagehood, individuals attempt to cultivate their virtues to the full in their relations with others. One may conclude that the relations with others are important for Chinese formation of the self, as profound discussion on the topic can be found in the Confucian framework. For example, besides Confucian teachings on personal cultivation, there is a lot of discussion in *Lunyu* that covers teachings on social relationships with others. However, the same depth is not observed in Taylor's discussion. It seems that Taylor takes a greater interest in various sources for individuals' moral framework.

What about the Taoist framework? The framework perceives that all things, including human beings, come from the same source—*dao*—and are part of the integral whole, and it encourages equal respect for others. Nevertheless, it seems that Taoists are more concerned about advocating individuals to let go of their ego and follow the natural rhythms and patterns of nature—follow *dao* (Section 3.3.2.1). When individuals are able to follow *dao*, nature, including the relationships with *wanwu* (ten thousand things in nature), would be at peace of its own accord. If in work, it may mean that individuals might need to hold back even it is very attempting to take action but allow things to settle themselves.

Unlike Giddens' framework, Taylor's framework and the Chinese philosophical frameworks share a key concern, which is morality. However, they still have quite different interpretations and foci on points of interest. Besides, the Confucian and Taoist frameworks make it clear what individuals should do, whereas if Taylor's framework is followed, individuals may not be sure what action could be taken.

7.2.3 From Ricoeur to the Chinese

In Chapter 3, after departing from Taylor's framework, Paul Ricoeur's framework was introduced for explaining the behaviour of the research subject. In the discussion, two significant themes in Ricoeur's framework—relations with others and ethics—are found to be important to the Chinese context (see Table 7.3, p. 252).

7.2.3.1 Relations with others

Although one may see that the existence of others is important for an individual's formation of the self in Taylor's theory, Taylor does not provide a lot of explicit discussion on this theme. Unlike Taylor, Ricoeur suggests that the existence of others is crucial for the constitution of the self. This is clearly shown in his discussion on the theory of action, personal identity and narrative identity.

When considering a fundamental philosophical question 'Who am I', Ricoeur brings in the theory of action (Section 3.2.3). By analysing the reasons for action, one may be able to trace the self; the agent that takes action. Ricoeur further points out that besides an acting individual, an action often requires a patient; a suffering individual. Through the action that an individual takes towards another individual, the former make sense of his or her self. The existence of others in the self's formation, thus, is evidenced by this pair of acting and suffering individuals. Ricoeur also emphasises the idea that individuals not only are the agent of the action, sometimes they are also the patient of the action. Therefore, an individual is not just an acting individual, but also a suffering individual. Being the patient of the action, the individual becomes the other to the agent of the action.

One may argue that there is a loophole when the theory of action is used to show the importance of the other in the self's formation, as some actions do not require a patient. For example, in the action 'I jump', only the acting individual is present, and there is no suffering individual. Ricoeur perhaps would argue that the suffering individual is the body of I: I make myself (my body) jump, as Ricoeur perceives one's own body is one of the three types of the other (Section 3.2.3.3). Ricoeur not only provides detailed discussion on the 'otherness' in individuals seeking for the answer to the question 'Who am I', but also categorises the other into three different types instead of putting the other in one general category: the first other—the "integral other"—is one's own body which has an integral relationship with the self; the second other—the "immediate other"—is another human being which has an interpersonal relationship with the self; and the third other—the "distant other"—exists in a form of social norm or social conscience and has an intrapersonal relationship with the self.

Seeking the answer for the question 'Who am I' does not seem to be the focus of the discussion, at least not in an explicit way, in the Confucian framework. Despite that, Confucians probably would share Ricoeur's idea that for individuals to make sense of their selves, it depends on their regards, words and actions towards the other. Browsing through *Lunyu,* the analects of Confucius, it is not difficult to see the discussion between Confucius and his disciples on how individuals should treat others. In the Confucian framework, similar to Ricoeur, Confucians also classify the other into different types. For example, in *Li Ji* (*The Classic of Rites*), Confucians advocate *xiushen* (master one's body), *qijia* (manage one's family), *zhiguo* (administer a country), *pingtianxia* (maintain peace in the world), which is similar to Riceour's three types of the other: *Shen* (body) is the first other, the "integral other", *jia* (family) is the "immediate other"; whereas *guo* (country) and *tianxia* (the world) are the "distant other". However, Confucian classification of the other is more complicated than that of Riceour; more sub-catagories are found. For example, in the "immediate other", *jia* (family), Confucians have three of the *wulun* (the five cardinal relations). The three relations are father-son, husband-wife and brothers. In fact for Confucians, the relations with others are so important for individuals to make sense of their selves that considerable discussion on how individuals should treat different others, such as parents, spouses, siblings, children and friends is found (Section 3.3.1.3.2). For instance, when discussing a person's relationships with parents, the ruler and friends, Zi Xia, a disciple of Confucius, said,

> "... who exerts himself to the utmost in the service of his parents and offers his person to the service of his lord, and who, in his dealings with his friends, is trustworthy in what he says..." (*Lunyu*, 1:7; in Lau, 2001, p.5)

Mencius, a follower of Confucius and a major advocator of Confucian teachings, also had various discussions on human relations. He advocated,

> "Love between father and son, duty between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the older over the young, and faith between friends." (*Mencius*, 3A:4; in Lau, 2003, pp. 115–116).

What about the Taoist framework? As discussed before, while Taoists encourage equal respect for others, they do not like to interfere and believe individuals should be left alone to find their ways to align themselves with *dao*; therefore, the discussion is more on how individuals could follow *dao* than on the relations with others in the framework.

Ricoeur further argues that the self, the agent of actions, has its own history and needs a personal identity which is made up of *idem*-identity (sameness) and *ipse*-identity (selfhood) (Section 3.2.3.1). The discussion on an individual's *ipse*-identity demonstrates the significance of others in the formation of the self. *Idem*-identity refers to the "perseverance" of an individual: beneath all the different variations of the individual, a certain substance in the individual remains invariable and constant, "character", in the course of his or her life. The "character" of an individual is crucial as it allows the individual to be recognised by the other as being the same person. In *ipse*-identity, the self-constancy is attained when an individual faithfully fulfils his or her promises. Now, not just an individual's action, but his or her promises define who the individual is. An individual's promises imply "otherness", as the individual has the responsibility to keep his or her words to others. By keeping his or her promises to others, an individual ties word to action and defines selfhood:

> "The properly ethical justification of the promise suffices of itself, a justification which can be derived from the obligation to safeguard the institution of language and to respond to the trust that the other places in my faithfulness." (1992, p. 125)

Confucius did not discuss individuals' personal identity, which apparently is a term used in modern times. In addition, he did not discuss how individuals keeping their word affected the formation of their selves. However, he did regard keeping one's word as important and what *junzi* (a virtuous person) should do. Confucius once said that if a man is trustworthy in his word he will go forward without obstruction (*Lunyu*, 15:6). You Zi, a disciple of Confucius, viewed that to be trustworthy in word is close to being moral (*Lunyu*, 1:13). Similarly, Zi Xia, another disciple of Confucius, also said that a person of virtue should be trustworthy in what he says in his dealings with his friends (*Lunyu*, 1:7). Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 3, the basic sense of *xin* (trustworthiness), one of the Five Constant Virtues advocated by Confucians, is being true to one's word (Section 3.3.1.3.5). Being trustworthy in one's relationship with others is considered as proper fulfilment of one's duties to others.

Ricoeur's narrative identity allows the notion of personal identity to be thought of in a new way. Narrative identity is the identity of the character of a story (narrative) and it bridges *idem* (sameness) and *ipse* (selfhood). Configuring agents, objects, events in a temporal framework, the narrative provides a space for the interaction between the self that maintains constancy (sameness) and the self that commits itself to change and transformation (selfhood), and the self is constructed through this dialectic. We come to understand the character when the story develops—unfolding what happens to the character, what aims he/she has, and what he or she does. Similarly, individuals come to know their selves when they tell their life stories. When individuals tell their life stories, they find that there are always others in their stories and their life is linked to these others. Through the interaction and involvement with others in their life stories, individuals make sense of their selves. In dealings with others, individuals do not simply enact a role that has been assigned to them, but can change and transform.

Although Confucius did not discuss how narratives help individuals make sense of their selves, he often used stories to teach his disciples how they should treat others. It is true that Confucius told his disciples explicitly the "dos and don'ts" for being *junzi* (a virtuous person), such as:

> "The gentleman (*junzi*) seeks neither a full belly nor a comfortable home. ..." (*Lunyu*, 1:14; in Lau, 2003, p. 7)
>
> "In his dealings with the world the gentleman (*junzi*) is not invariably for or against anything. ..." (*Lunyu*, 4:10; in Lau, 2003, p. 31)
>
> "The gentleman (*junzi*) is troubled by his own lack of ability, not by the failure of others to appreciate him." (*Lunyu*, 15:19; in Lau, 2003, p. 153)

Confucius was also fond of drawing the attention of his disciples to the stories telling the deeds of concrete characters and how they responded to others. For example, when Confucius discussed *ren* (authoritative conduct) with Zi Lu and Zi Gong, two of his disciples, Confucius used the story about Guan Zhong and his lord, Huan Gong (Duke Huan), for the discussion (*Lunyu*, 14:16–17, in Zheng, 2007, pp. 213–215). Zi Lu and Zi Gong queried that Guan Zhong did not died for his master, Gongzi Jiu (Prince Jiu), when Huan Gong killed the prince. On the contrary, Guan Zhong served and helped Huan Gong to become the leader of the feudal lords. Confucius, however, suggested that Guan Zhong was regarded as *ren*, as he was willing to neglect personal honour for the benefits of others. Because of his assistance, people were able to live in peace under Huan Gong's governance. Through this story, Confucius brought out one of the qualities of *ren*—a person of *ren* would seek to benefit others even at the cost of personal benefits.

7.2.3.2 The self in its ethical dimension

Ricoeur's narrative theory not only shows the importance of others in individuals' formation of the self, but also brings to the fore the ethical dimension of the self. When a story is told, individuals are unlikely to remain neutral; on the contrary, they inevitably prefer a certain course of action to others valuing one character and devaluing another. Individuals evaluate the characters' deeds; assessing whether the characters have fulfilled their promises with others and whether they are accountable for their acts. Ricoeur sees that narratives provide a space for individuals to experiment when their "moral judgment operates in a hypothetical mode" (1992, p. 170). Through the evaluation of the ethical choices that characters made in the story, individuals come to understand their selves.

As discussed in Section 7.2.3.1, it seems that using stories to help individuals form their selves is also found in the tradition of Confucian teachings. For example, for Confucians, *xiao* (filial piety—love and respect for the parents and ancestors) is one of the virtues, and naturally, *xiao* becomes the concern of many stories told by Confucians. One of the most famous collections is *Twenty-four Filial Exemplars*, which consists of the stories about children showing their love and respect for the parents and elderly people. Individuals are called to evaluate the actions of the children in these stories by determining whether they are praiseworthy or not. In line with Ricoeur's discussion on narratives, the stories told in the Confucian framework also offer individuals a choice to consider whether they themselves are the worthy subject of a good life when they evaluate the characters' regard, words and actions in the stories.

Ricoeur makes it very clear that there is an ethical aim for human life (Section 3.2.3.3). In his discussion on the notion of self, Ricoeur explores the question: 'How should I live?' For Ricoeur, the ethical aim of one's life is to show that oneself is the worthy subject of a good life. Unlike Giddens, Ricoeur's definition for good life is not for self pleasure or self indulgence. For Ricoeur, to have a good life, individuals must have associates with and for whom individuals act. When discussing what good life is, Ricoeur emphasises "living well with or for others". That shows that individuals are utterly reliant upon each other: we are in debt to each other and have a duty to care for each other. However, when individuals feel that they are commanded by duty and need to respond to the demand of the other, they need to consider the rule of justice as the good life needs to be "in just institutions". For Ricoeur, justice is associated with the ideas of sharing and equality. To be able to share with others and treat others equally calls for solicitude that one shows to others. In other words, when one is able to have empathy with the other, one could then live a good life. Therefore for Ricoeur, the ethical actions taken towards the other is crucial for individuals to define their selves. With the presence of others, individuals will be able to engender self-respect and justice; in turn, they will be able to create and preserve their self-esteem. Without the presence of others, individuals would have no one to sympathise with or feel compassions for, and they would not be able to take any ethical action. Not being able to take any ethical action means that individuals would not be able to make sense of their selves.

Like Ricoeur, Confucius also regarded "living well with others" or precisely "living in harmony with others" as the aim for human life. Confucius treasured *he* (harmony) and he advocated that "*jun zi he er bu tong*" (The gentleman *(junzi)* agrees with others without being an echo) (*Lunyu*, 13:23; in Lau, 2001, p. 129). Confucius spent his lifetime teaching his disciples to nurture their *de* (virtue) including *ren*, *yi*, *li*, *zhi* and *xin*, so that they could live harmoniously with others. Taoists also advocate that the life aim is living in harmony with others. However, unlike Confucians, Taoists held that "others" are not just referred to other human beings, but also include all the beings in nature.

Ricoeur views that having a sense of justice, however, is not enough to guide one's ethical action. Therefore, in cases when a universe law conflicts with respect for others, Ricoeur believe individuals need to rely on practical wisdom to determine what genuine solicitude the other would require. For Ricoeur, "practical wisdom consists in inventing conduct that will best satisfy the exception that solicitude requires by breaking the rule to the smallest extent possible" (1992, p. 269). While practical wisdom always searches for justice and equal respect for others, it takes each person's uniqueness in a real context into consideration when making the most appropriate ethical choice.

It seems that instead of blindly following abstract rules, Confucius also appreciated that when taking an ethical action, individuals should consider each case and the uniqueness of the person they respond to. For example, when discussing *ren* (authoritative conduct) with his disciples, Confucius gave different answers in different occasions (Section 3.3.1.3.1). This shows that Confucius considered the uniqueness of his disciples and the context they were in when he taught them *ren*. The Confucian concept of *yi* (appropriateness) also promotes a judgment appropriate to the situation at hand and individuals' social status or roles (Section 3.3.1.3.2), which is very similar to the notion of practical wisdom in Ricoeur's framework. As for the Taoist framework, one may suspect that the only consideration for the judgement is whether it follows the patterns of nature. When individuals can conform to the way in which *dao* operates, they would be able to respond spontaneously in an appropriate manner (Section 3.3.2.3).

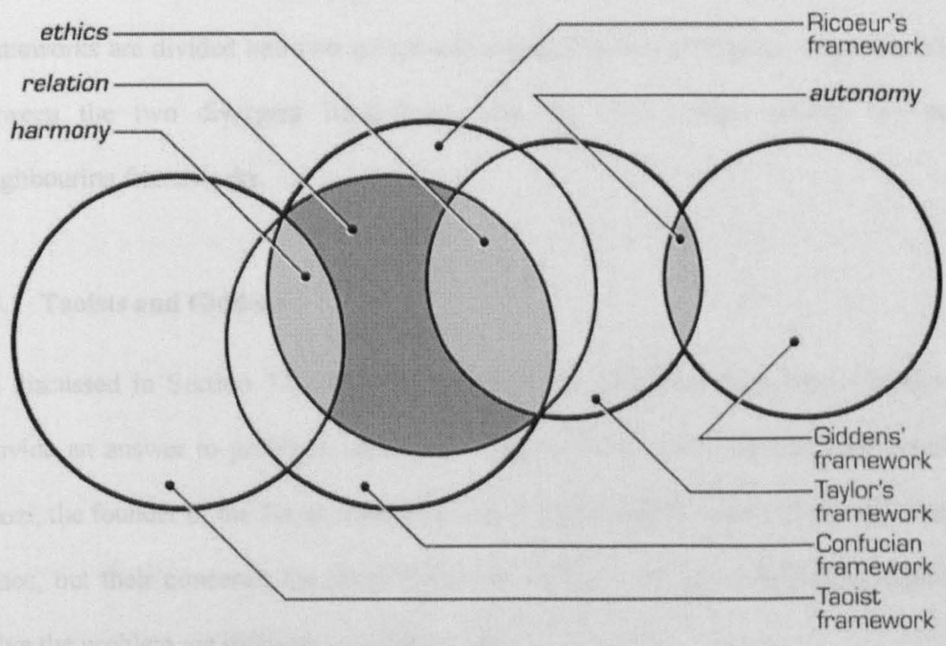
The dialogue between Ricoeur and Taoists shows that there are not too many common concerns; however, the dialogue between Ricoeur and Confucians seems to be the most agreeable one, as they share many similar views. Perhaps the major difference between the two is, Ricoeur, as well as Taylor, is more concerned about what constitutes the good when discussing the formation of the self; whereas Confucians probably regard how individuals become the good itself as being more important.

7.3 Possible alternative dialogues

In the following, space will be provided for the Chinese to "speak back" as an equal partner to the dominant, and dialogues will be led by the Chinese philosophical frameworks assessing the focal points of interest in these frameworks in the light of Giddens', Taylor's and Ricoeur's frameworks.

Based on the discussion above, if one places the five frameworks: those of Giddens, Taylor and Ricoeur, and the Confucian and the Taoist ones, on a continuum, Giddens' framework and the Taoist framework would occupy the two ends whereas the other three could be positioned somewhere in the middle close to each other (see Figure 7.1). Giddens' framework could be described as self-centred, whereas the Taoist framework could be regarded as naturalistic which encourages individuals to live in accord with nature.

Figure 7.1: The five frameworks



As for Taylor's, Ricoeur's and Confucian frameworks, a common core theme that draws the three close to each other is morality. All three frameworks suggest that morality is crucial for the self formation; without ethics, there would be no self. Another core theme: relations with others put Ricoeur's and Confucian frameworks further closer together. Both frameworks see the relations with others are essential for individuals to form their selves.

While Giddens' framework occupies one end, it is close to Taylor's framework than to Ricoeur's framework, as Giddens and Taylor share a common interest in their concern of autonomy. As for the Taoist framework, similar to the Confucian and Ricoeur's frameworks, it also share an interest in the relations with others, but only that its interpretation of "others" is different from that the interpretation of the latter. The Taoist framework interprets "others" as "nature", while the Confucian and Ricoeur's frameworks interpret "others" mainly as "other people".

To avoid unnecessarily repeating what has been discussed in Section 7.2, the five frameworks are divided into two groups and engaged in two dialogues: one takes place between the two divergent frameworks, and the other occurs among the three neighbouring frameworks.

7.3.1 Taoists and Giddens

As discussed in Section 7.2.1.4, both the Taoist and Giddens' frameworks attempt to provide an answer to problems arising in a chaotic time. The situations confronted by Laozi, the founder of the Taoist framework, and Giddens might share a similarity—full of chaos, but their concerns, the diagnosis of the problem and the approach employed to solve the problem are different (see Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2: A possible alternative dialogue—Taoist and Giddens

(Self and Other)

'Let go of the self' ← → **Self-centred**

Taoist framework

- living in harmony with nature is the aim of a good life
- *dao* created everything including human beings; therefore, everything is part of the integral whole and enjoys equal respect
- individuals' life choice should follow the patterns of nature and individuals are encouraged to get rid of their desire

Giddens' framework

- creating a coherent sense of self is the aim of the life
- self is the centre; others are instrumental for individuals' formation of self
- individuals' life choices are based on personal pleasure and desire; there is no need to consider others

Confucian, Ricoeur's and Taylor's frameworks (Figure 7.3)

7.3.1.1 Harmony with nature

Facing a chaotic time, Laozi was more concerned about how order could be restored so that people could live in harmony with *wanwu* (ten thousand things in nature), whereas Giddens was more concerned about how individuals could find security when the whole world seems to have tumbled.

For Laozi, *dao* created everything including human beings. *Dao* is not a 'God-like' creator; it is impersonal. It puts everything in its place without prejudice and guides the functions of everything in nature. Therefore, *dao* is the way of nature which keeps it balanced and in order (Section 3.3.2.1).

When individuals conform to the way in which *dao* operates, then they can live in harmony with not only other human beings but also everything in nature. Laozi never put human beings in a more important or superior place than that of other creatures or things, nor did he regard human beings as having power or privilege over other beings. Taoists believe all the things come from the same source—*dao*—and are part of the integral whole:

> "The way begets one; one begets two; two begets three; three begets the myriad creatures. The myriad creatures carry on their backs the *yin* and embrace in their arms the *yang* and are the blending of the generative forces of the two." (*Daodejing*, 42; in Lau, 2001, p. 63)

They are not only part of the integral whole, but also essential components of the whole. For Taoists, *yin* and *yang* form creative efficacy of the dynamic relationships (Section 3.3.2.2). As *yin* and *yang* are not static, they are not regarded as universal principles that define phenomena. One thing could be *yin* of another thing, but *yang* of yet another. *Yin* and *yang* constantly interact and change. They are opposite but not mutually exclusive elements in life within the greater whole. Therefore, all the things are equally important and should enjoy equal status. When individuals understand *dao*, they would understand that they are only part of the whole, and living in harmony with nature is the aim of a good life.

Giddens, as a sociologist, does not seem to have given some thought to what or who created the world, nor does he discuss how individuals should live with other creatures or things in nature. Confronted by a chaotic time, he is not interested in how the order of society should be restored but how one might find one's own order without being constrained by the order of the outside world (Section 3.2.1.2). Giddens does not seem to have any faith in people that they have the potential to restore the order of society. In that sense, he seems to be quite pessimistic. Laozi probably shared a similar view of Giddens. Unlike Confucius, Laozi did not try to restore the order of society through, for example, ritual education advocated by Confucius; he regarded such education as artificial and hypocritical. Laozi believed when people follow *dao*, order will be restored by itself, without the interference of other people. Therefore, he regarded the best leader as one who does not interfere with the life of its people:

> "Govern the states by justice, waged wars by violations, but conquered the world by non-intervention." (*Daodejing*, 57; in Chen & Zhang, 2001, p. 158)

The above statement can be interpreted as when people are allowed to follow *dao* without interference, the social order will be restored by itself.

While Taoists tie themselves with other beings into a unit and pursue harmony in this unit, Giddens only regards individuals themselves as a unit and seek unity in one's lifespan—a coherent sense of self. He believes when one achieves one's internal order creating a coherent sense of self, then one could be the basis of one's own ontological security, which was once built on the regulations and practices embedded in tradition. In other words, it does not matter how chaotic society is, as long as individuals are true to themselves and maintain a coherence narrative of their selves, they would feel secure as stability is provided by their own coherence selves. Following Giddens' framework, the other does not concern the self.

While Taoists see that everything should enjoy equality and no one or nothing should have more power over others, Giddens' framework seems to encourage individuals to exploit others to achieve their own aim to maintain a coherent sense of self. 'Exploit' might be too strong a word, but instead of seeing other beings as an essential part of the unit, 'others are just a means to individuals' end' seems to be the overall tone of Giddens' framework. Giddens' discussion on pure relations (Section 3.2.1.3) is a good example to illustrate this. For Giddens, the relations that individuals form with other beings in modern society are only based on individual personal needs and pleasure. Whether these relations are brief or long-term depends solely on individuals' choice. Therefore, pure relations are internally referential depending on the satisfaction and reward that is brought by the relations. In other words, how others feel and opine about the relations are not an individual's concern. What kind of society it is, if this philosophy is followed?

Laozi believed that the disorder in his time was the excessive desire of people, especially the political leaders. Therefore, he advocated that individuals get rid of their desire, the world would be at peace of its own accord, and order would be restored. Giddens seems to suggest otherwise, however. His celebration of individuals' freedom in making their choices when creating who they are seems to boost individuals to be indulged in their own desires. If that is followed, one just wonders what the consequence would be. For Giddens, key reference points for individuals attempting to sustain a coherent self through life choices are internal: personal integrity of the self that comes from creating a personal belief system that one's primary loyalty is to his or her own self. In other words, individuals do not have to answer to anyone but themselves. One might suspect that what Giddens advocates is exactly the cause that Laozi attributed to the disorder in his time—the excessive desire. Such desire jeopardises the harmony that individuals have with *wanwu* (ten thousand things in nature).

7.3.1.2 *Ziran* and *wuwei*

As discussed, Laozi perceived that when one follows *dao*, one will be able to live in harmony with others. How could one follow *dao* then? Laozi upheld that during the creation through *dao* individuals have obtained *de*—the latent power, which empowers individuals to conform to the way that *dao* operates (Section 3.3.2.3). To manifest *de*, one has to let go of their ego or desire and act in accordance with the natural patterns of things without inappropriate interference. When individuals want to gain something, they have to let go of something. Therefore, Taoists advocate *ziran* and *wuwei* (naturalness and non-assertive action).

In Section 3.3.2.4, *ziran* (naturalness) was described as 'what is so of itself' (Zhang, 2002). Taoists believe individuals should observe the patterns of nature and follow these patterns when they act in different situations. Any attempts to interfere with these patterns are disapproved by Taoists arguing that this will only disrupt the harmony among *wanwu* (ten thousand things in nature). This explains why Laozi advocated *juexue* (abandon learning) and resisted the Confucian ritual education, which he regarded as trivial and elaborate formalities. He argued that ritual education would only constrain individuals' *xin* (heart-mind) preventing it from 'listening' to nature and follow the patterns of nature. Therefore, Taoists criticise the Confucian teachings of, for example, *ren*, *li* and *yi* regarding these teachings as artificial and hypocritical violating *ziran* (the nature). Only when people return to *ziran*, can they enjoy happiness:

> "People need something that they can attach themselves to: reveal simplicity; embrace the nature; restrain selfishness; reduce desires, abandon learning and there will no longer be worries." (*Daodejing*, 19; in Chen & Zhang, 2001, p. 55)

Giddens' framework does not necessarily oppose the way of life that Taoists encourage. However, for Giddens, such a way of life is only one of the many lifestyles available for individuals to choose. There is no evidence that Giddens advocates a lifestyle that promotes harmony with others, nor does he show any interest in encouraging individuals to conform to the patterns of nature. Giddens only maintains that it is important for autonomic individuals to reflexively construct a consistent trajectory of the self. Therefore, as mentioned before, what concerns him is whether individuals can maintain a coherent sense of self when making lifestyle choices as this coherent sense of self is the source for individuals' "ontological security" in a chaotic time.

Although Laozi regarded *tian di bu ren* (nature is not humane) (*Daodejing*, 5) and proposed *jue ren qi yi* (abandon humanity and discard rightness) (*Daodejing*, 19), it does not mean that individuals will discard their affection when they follow the rules of nature. Taoists believe when individuals allow their inner nature to reveal itself, virtues like humanity, justice, and propriety will emerge without effort. That is the reason that Taoists have contempt for social virtues that Confucians advocate. They argue that these man-made virtues that require deliberate effort will only alienate individuals from their innate virtue and obstruct the patterns of nature. As Ivanhoe (2007a), an East Asian philosophy scholar, discussed, when one is concerned with being morally better by trying one's best to manifest virtues like *ren, yi* and *li*, one does not become morally better as one switches one's focus on the action rather than the virtues themselves. In fact, it is paradoxical. When ethical actions become the end rather than the means, individuals become hypocrites. One may suspect whether these individuals could be described as moral persons. This explains why Taoists value *ci* (compassion) and disapprove the Confucian *ren* (authoritative conduct). For Taoists, the difference between the two is *ren* calls for individuals' conscious exertion and *ci* is a spontaneous kindness; one is purposeful and the other is effortless.

While Laozi encouraged individuals to trust their inner nature by allowing it to reveal and subsequently bring out virtues from them, Giddens claims that individuals should make an effort to achieve a coherent life fashion, and thus develop an "inner authenticity" which serves as "a framework of basic trust" (Section 7.2.1.1). That is why Giddens argues that self is a reflexive project in which individuals need to do a lot of reflection on what lifestyle choices they make in their day-to-day activities to create ordered stories of the self. This call for deliberate effort is against the Taoist concept of *wuwei* (non-assertive action), which explains *ziran* (naturalness) in practice.

As discussed in Section 3.3.2.4, *wuwei* does not mean 'no action' or "non action", it only discourages coercive actions that are tainted by stored knowledge or ingrained habits. *Wuwei* is an action of *ziran* (spontaneity) which serves as a consequence of deferential responses to the particular situation in which individuals are involved. For Laozi, coercive actions sometimes may result in negative consequences whereas *wuwei* (non-assertive action) enables one to reach the goal without effort:

> "The softest thing in the world can triumph over the hardest; non-being can enter even where there is no space. Through this I know the value of non-assertive action." (*Daodejing*, 43; in Chen & Zhang, 2001, p. 122)

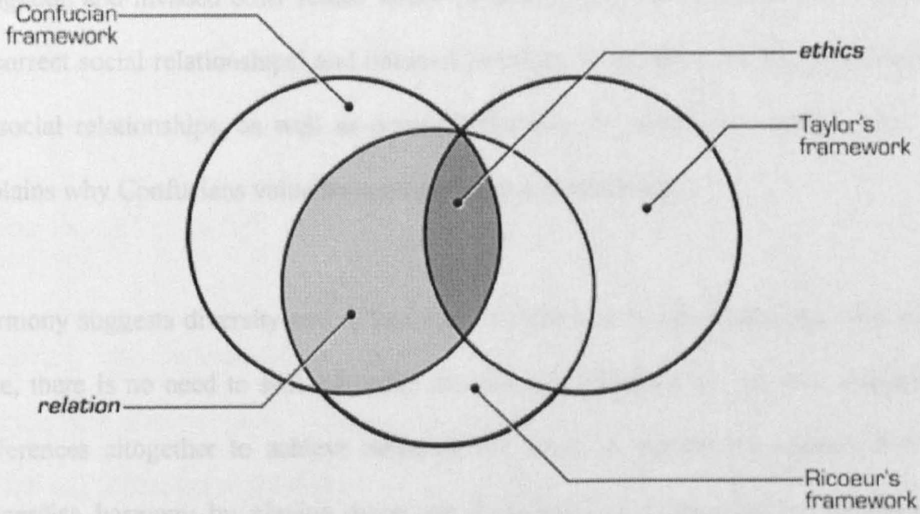
Wuwei is an action of *ziran* (spontaneity); a spontaneous response to the world. Ivanhoe (2007a) describes nature as the ultimate example for *wuwei*: "Rivers flow, winds blow, and the seasons revolve spontaneously and without ulterior motives" (p. 284). To be able to act in a *wuwei* manner, individuals need to be *wuwo* (selfless) letting go of themselves and following the rhythms and patterns of nature. If one focuses on oneself, one's stored knowledge or ingrained habits may bring about coercive actions whereas, without one's pre-conceived preferences, one will be able to act spontaneously according to the particular situation in which one is involved.

In contrast, Giddens encourages individuals to take deliberate efforts in planning their life. In the course of making lifestyle choices, individuals need to reflect on their past experience, evaluate their present situation and project their future so as to achieve a coherent link among the past, present, and future (Section 3.2.1.1). In every single step of the reflexive project of self, individuals themselves are the focus. Therefore, Giddens believes one should be in control of how one should live one's life, whereas Taoists believe individuals should allow nature to 'dictate' their life. If the Taoist framework advocates 'letting go of the self' and 'naturalism', then Giddens' framework clearly promotes 'self-centredness' encouraging extreme individuality as one's pleasure and desire are the basis for one's decision in lifestyle choices. Giddens seems to suggest that others are unimportant and can be completely ignored. If that is the case, could others be taken away? If so, is there such things as society, hence, history, culture and tradition? This falls back to the same question: what kind of world it would be?

7.3.2 Confucius, Ricoeur and Taylor

As pointed out before, while the Taoist and Giddens frameworks take up the two ends of the continuum, the Confucian, Ricoeur and Taylor frameworks are closer to each other in the continuum (see Figure 7.3). In the following, the Confucian understanding of two areas of interest: harmonious relationship and ethical virtues will be discussed in the light of Ricoeur's and Taylor's frameworks (see Table 7.4, p. 253). Through the examination of each other's position in these two areas, a new understanding may be revealed.

Figure 7.3: A possible alternative dialogue—Confucians, Ricoeur and Taylor



7.3.2.1 Harmonious human relationships

One probably would agree that harmonious human relationship is valued in the Confucian framework. To explore this topic, one would need to examine two notions: harmony and human relationships.

He (harmony) perhaps is most cherished ideal in the Confucian framework. One would have a better understanding of this if one examines the Confucian concept of *dao*. *Dao* (the way) is the ideal life that Confucians advocate, and the essence of this ideal life lies in the harmony of the diverse elements (Section 3.3.1.1). Although this harmony could refer to harmony with nature, Confucius was more concerned about harmony with other people. Mencius also commented that harmony is the most important:

> "Heaven's favourable weather is less important than Earth's advantageous terrain, and Earth's advantageous terrain is less important than human unity (*ren he*)." (*Mengzi*, 2B:1; in Lau, 2003, p. 79)

As discussed in Section 7.2.1.1, Confucius believed that harmony was replaced by chaos and disorder in his time (the Spring and Autumn Period, 722 BC–476 BC) as a result of the diminishing of virtues among people violating the code for social relations with others. Feudal lords failed to show their loyalty to the emperor; feudal states neglected the moral obligation and invaded other feudal states. Perceiving that the problems were caused by 'incorrect social relationships' and immoral practice, he therefore advocated correctness of social relationships, as well as personal morality, to restore the social order. That explains why Confucians value harmonious human relationships.

Harmony suggests diversity and differences. If there is only one thing, one view or one tune, there is no need to seek harmony. However, Confucians do not seek to eliminate differences altogether to achieve harmony but tends to resolve the tension that may jeopardise harmony by playing down the differences. As discussed in Section 6.3.1, Confucian harmony does not entail sameness. Confucius believed that *junzi* (a virtuous person) harmonises but does not seek sameness, while *xiaoren* (a mean-spirited person) seeks sameness but not to harmonise. In work, following this, one would avoid mindlessly agreeing with others' ideas but to put forward one's ideas in a non-confrontation manner. For Confucius, a virtuous person would value different opinions and work with different people in a harmonious way. Indeed, "[h]armony out of diversity produces a lively world; sameness without adequate difference can only lead to a dead end." (Li, 2006, p. 585) Confucius's view of harmony can be illustrated by his affection for delightful music. Delightful music is tolerant in allowing each musical note to have its place, bringing them together and turning them into a beautiful tune. When the musical notes are the same, however, the tune will not be melodic and beautiful but monotonous.

While Confucians seek harmony but not sameness, it is important to point out that a certain degree of commonality is still needed. Confucius once said, "*dao bu tong, bu xiang wei mou*" (There is no point in people taking counsel together who follow different ways) (*Lunyu*, 15:40; in Lau, 1992, p. 159). Therefore, Confucians do not reject sameness altogether, but only reject the sameness that resulted from echoing others words or ideas because such sameness does not cultivate growth.

It is interesting to note, at this point, that neither Taylor nor Ricoeur discusses the notion of harmony in their frameworks. For Taylor, others play an important role in individuals' formation of self. Taylor defines that self as dialogical:

> "... one cannot be a self on one's own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors ... A self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution'." (1989, p. 36)

Therefore, individuals in dialogue with their community, not only their "stand on moral and spiritual dimensions but also some reference to a defining community" (p. 36), is central to the shaping of their selves. Although one may argue that Taylor's discussion of dialogical self suggests that social relationships are crucial to his framework, there is no evidence to show that Taylor regards having a harmonious relationship with others as important and that harmony has little weight in his framework.

As for Ricoeur, although the word 'harmony' is not used in his framework, it seems that he would value harmony as he sees that the aim of a good life is to "live well with and for others" (1992, p. 239). When individuals desire to live well with others, they probably would try to live in harmony with others. Although Ricoeur does not precisely say what 'good life' is, he describes 'good life' as "the nebulus of ideals and dreams of achievements with regard to which a life is held to be more or less fulfilled or unfulfilled" (p. 179). Therefore, each individual is responsible for developing his or her answer to the injunction to lead a good life. Despite that there is a diversity of answers to the call for a good life, to live a good life, individuals must have associates with and for whom they act, which entails friendship. Friendship is a mutual relationship that calls for respect and love between an individual and others. One could say that the mutual respect and love called by friendship can be the basis for achieving harmony with others when there are differences between individuals.

It might not be obvious that Confucian harmony also suggests equality. In the Confucian view, *tian* (heaven) created everything, including humans, and everything was born with 'heavenly nature', intrinsic goodness (Section 3.3.1.1). Therefore, nothing or no one can claim that it or s/he is superior to others and the world is there for everyone and everything. Following this, a harmonious relationship will only result from mutual support and complementarity between the parties involved. If that is the case, one may wonder why Confucians advocate *wulun* (five cardinal relations), seemingly hierarchical relationships, in which some (e.g. father, husband and elder brother) seem to enjoy more authority and privileges than others (e.g. son, wife and younger brother) (Section 3.3.1.3.2).

Indeed, *wulun* is an important notion in the Confucian framework. Rosemont (1976) sees that the framework not only describes a set of social roles through *wulun*, but also offers a set of scripts (i.e. *li*, ritual propriety) that describes the code of conduct of these roles. He believes if individuals fulfil their roles properly, they will be able to live well together in harmony. How important are these roles? Rosemont argues that individuals do not just play roles but become the roles they fulfil. Following this, roles become the foundation of the Confucian harmony. If that was the case, Confucians indeed advocated hierarchical relationships. However, this actually misunderstands the essence of *wulun*. As Ivanhoe (2007b) rightly points out, it does not matter so much what role that one plays, but how one plays it. Only through practising virtues when one fulfils one's role, can one realise *dao* and live in harmony with others. In a conventional understanding of the Confucian framework, Chinese do not seem to have individuality and they just play their roles. However, exercising one's role as prescribed is not the heart of Confucian ideas; how one plays one's role is. Therefore, roles are only the context for individuals to practise virtues; virtues, not the roles, are the foundation.

Valuing the importance of human relationships is not unique to Confucians; Taylor also places great value on it. As discussed in Section 3.2.2.3, Taylor believes it is important to know that one is a self only among other selves, and a self can never be described without reference to those who surround it. Following this, one could argue that for Taylor to define one's self, an individual needs to have relationships with others; without these relationships, an individual will find it difficult to define his or her self. Regrettably, Taylor does not offer adequate discussion on human relationships in his framework.

What about Ricoeur's framework? It is clear that Ricoeur values the importance of human relationships. Unlike Taylor, who does not have much discussion on human relationships, Ricoeur explores the relationship between the self and multiple others in his framework (Section 3.2.3.3). As discussed in Section 7.2.3.1, there are similarities between Ricoeur's discussion on these multiple others and Confucians advocating *xiushen* (master one's body), *qijia* (manage one's family), *zhiguo* (administer a country), *pingtianxia* (maintain peace in the world). Despite the similarities, there are two ideas that are not emphasised in Ricoeur's notion of multiple others. The first one is harmony. While the Confucian teaching of "*xiushen qijia zhiguo pingtianxia*" suggests harmony: harmony within one's body, harmony within one's household, harmony within one's country and harmony in the world, Ricoeur's discussion on the multiple others does not emphasise harmony, though one may suspect that Ricoeur probably would agree with seeking harmony in these relationships given his stress on "living well with and for others". The second one is social roles. In his discussion on the second other—other human beings—Ricoeur does not discuss particular social roles played by these people. Apparently, social roles play a very important role in the Confucian framework while Ricoeur does not seem to share such a view.

7.3.2.2 *Junzi*: a virtuous person

If *he* (harmony) is the most cherished ideal in the Confucian framework and Confucians value harmonious human relationships, then how can harmony be achieved and how can harmonious human relationships be established? Confucians believe that social disorder is caused by individuals' uncultivated character; therefore, if individuals cultivate their character, harmony will result:

> "He cultivates himself and thereby brings peace and security to the people. Even Yao and Shun[19] would have found the task of bringing peace and security to the people taxing. " (*Lunyu*, 14:42; in Lau, 1992, p. 147)

In the Confucian framework, *junzi* (a virtuous person) is regarded as a person with cultivated character who acts ethically in all aspects of life (Section 3.3.1.2). Although being a *junzi* is an ethical ideal, Confucians believe everyone can be *junzi* as everyone has intrinsic goodness, which is endowed by Heaven (*tian*). A *junzi* will be able to manifest virtues (*de*) through the way they play their roles. As discussed in Section 3.3.1.2, *de* is a collective noun for ethical virtue, and *ren* (authoritative conduct), *yi* (appropriateness) *li* (ritual propriety), *zhi* (wisdom) and *xin* (trustworthiness) are regarded as Five Constant Virtues in the Confucian framework (Section 3.3.1.3).

Among the five virtues, *li* (ritual propriety) is thought to be fundamental to maintain social order as it governs "the way people interact in recurring social contexts" (Shun, 1997, p. 52). As discussed in Section 7.3.2.1, the social roles are the foundation of the Confucian harmony; only when individuals perform their roles ethically can harmony be achieved. *Li* gives guidance to individuals for performing roles. However, if they do not perform their roles morally, *li* is not observed accordingly. Confucius once said,

> "For a man who is able to govern a state by observing the rites and showing deference, what is there to holding office? For a man who is unable to govern a state by observing the rites and showing deference, what good can the rites be to him?" (*Lunyu*, 4:13; in Lau, 1992, p. 33)

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19 Yao and Shun were two rulers in ancient China in 23rd–22nd century BC. Confucians regard Yao and Shun as sage kings as they were rulers of great virtue.

Therefore, for Confucius, *li* is not just details of rituals, as many may interpret, but, more importantly, is also the external expression of the 'internal' morality. Therefore, Confucius regarded that without the internal morality, *li* becomes meaningless (Section 3.3.1.3.3). Since *li* is the external expression of the internal morality, the ritual details derived from *li* can be changed if it is justified and does not violate the internal morality:

> "According to ritual (*li*), the ceremonial cap should be made of hemp; nowadays it is made of silk, which is more convenient; I follow the general usage. According to ritual, one should bow at the bottom of the steps; nowadays people bow on top of the steps, which is rude. Even though it goes against the general usage, I bow at the bottom of the steps." (*Lunyu*, 9:3; in Leys, 1997, p. 39)

How do individuals decide in which situation changing the details of rituals is justified and in which situation it is not justified? As Lao (1988) rightly points out that *yi* (appropriateness) is the foundation of *li*, changing the ritual details would be regarded as justified if it is found appropriate when considering the situation at hand and the individuals social status or roles (Section 3.3.1.3.2).

To decide what is appropriate and right, individuals need to turn to *ren* (Lao, 1988). Mencius claimed that *ren* is the basis for individuals to decide what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' '*ju ren you yi*' (abiding by authoritative conduct and following appropriateness) (*Mengzi*, 4A:10; in Ren & Liu, 2004, p. 158). The central ethical interest of *ren* is the love and care that individuals show to others and their affectionate concern for the well-being of others (Section 3.3.1.3.1). While *ren* may call for partial care showing concern to individuals' immediate circles, people outside of these circles would not be ignored (Luo, 2007). However, this latter point is often missing in a conventional interpretation and Chinese are often regarded as only care about the interest of the in-group members and exclude the out-group members. While it might true in some cases, this is not the Confucian teachings advocate. Mencius once said,

> "Treat the aged of your own family in a manner befitting their venerable age and extend this treatment to the aged of other families; treat your own young in a manner befitting their tender age and extend this to the young of other families..." (*Mengzi*, 1A:7; in Lau, 2003, p. 19)

Confucius talked about two kinds of treatment when discussing *ren*: *shu* (empathy, reciprocity) and *zhong* (sincerity). *Shu* requires individuals not to bring harm on others and not impose on others what individuals do not desire; *zhong* calls for individuals to establish others and seeks to enlarge others. Therefore, to be *ren* requires individuals to be sincere and sympathetic in their relationship with others.

To achieve a good or harmonious relationship with others, Ricoeur emphasises friendship and justice; two chief virtues (Section 3.2.3.3). Friendship is a mutual relationship of reciprocity that demands respect and love between the self and the other, whereas justice sets a general standard for individuals to act objectively and impartially to others. Therefore, for Riceour, to have a harmonious relationship with others, individuals need to show their affection to others, they also need to treat others without prejudice. Although the virtues advocated in Riceour's framework may not be the same as those in the Confucian framework, there are some similarities between the two. It is true that Ricoeur does not discuss the notion of *li* (ritual propriety) as social roles do not play an important role in his framework and his notion of justice, which entails equality, might be different from the notion of *yi* (appropriateness), which is closer to Ricoeur's notion of practical wisdom (Section 7.2.3.2). However, there are similarities between Ricoeur's notion of friendship and the Confucian *ren*. Both suggest a 'selfless' concern for others. In a friendship, a friend could be regarded as another self. When one is able to see the friend as another self, then one is concerned about the friend; the suffering of the friend becomes one's suffering, and the friend's happiness becomes one's own happiness. Such compassion is also found in the Confucian *ren*, which is the notions of *shu* (empathy, reciprocity) and *zhong* (sincerity) discussed above.

What about Taylor? As discussed before, Taylor does not offer much discussion on human relationships in his framework though he values the importance of others. Nevertheless, he regards ethics as important, which is shared by Confucians. It is important to point out that in the Confucian framework, being a virtuous person is not just a means to a desirable human relationship; it is also an end in itself. To be a *junzi* is an ideal that should be pursued for its own sake. Although Taylor's framework may not be able to contribute much to the discussion on human relationships, the framework certainly has a lot to discuss about ethics in its dialogue with the Confucian framework. In the Confucian framework, there are Five Constant Virtues: *ren* (authoritative conduct), *yi* (appropriateness), *li* (r itual propriety), *zhi* (w isdom) and *xin* (trustworthiness). As discussed in Section 7.2.2.2, benevolence, one of the hypergoods discussed in Taylor's framework, shares similarities with the Confucian *ren*, in which both emphasise the well-being of others. Equal respect, Taylor's second hypergood, could be compared to the Confucian *li* as the notion entails *jing* (respect). However, *li* is a more complex notion as it also refers to the order of life which requires things to be "in their right position and in right relations with one another" (Section 3.3.1.3.3). One may compare Taylor's notion of justice, which is entailed by benevolence, to the Confucian *yi* (appropriateness). Taylor's notion of justice is similar to Ricoeur's notion of justice but has a different focus from that of Confucian notion of *yi*.

Zhi (wisdom) and *xin* (trustworthiness) are the two other virtues that Confucians value, though compared to *ren*, *yi* and *li*, these two virtues seem to receive less attention. *Zhi* (wisdom) therefore involves an individual's knowledge to practise *li*, *ren,* and *yi* in human relationships (Section 3.3.1.3.4) whereas *xin* is a proper fulfilment of one's duties to others. Taylor does not offer any similar concepts in his framework (Section 3.3.1.3.5). However, one would suspect that Taylor probably would agree these two virtues can be classified as life goods, which are components of a good life that help individuals create their selves (Section 3. 2.2.2). In the Confucian framework, these two virtues, together with *ren*, *yi* and *li*, indeed help individuals achieve their selves as *junzi*.

As for Ricoeur's framework, there is not much discussion on the notion of trustworthiness (*xin*) except that Ricoeur briefly mentions in the reciprocal relationship between the self and the other, individuals need to keep their words to prove they are trustworthy and can be relied on (Section 3.2.3.1). As one self as another, the Golden Rule: do to others as you want others to do to you is applied to this reciprocal relationship. If one wants others to keep their words, one needs to be trustworthy as well.

As for the notion of *zhi*, a similar notion, practical wisdom, is found in Ricoeur's framework. For Confucians, *zhi* is one's knowledge of lived human relationships knowing what is right and what is wrong and more importantly being able to take appropriate actions and avoid doing wrongs. Confucius believed if one cannot socialise with others in an appropriate way, one cannot be regarded as having *zhi*. As for Ricoeur, individuals need to appeal to their practical wisdom for actual implication of ethics. Individuals need to rely on their practical wisdom to decide their concrete action in the situation at hand. Therefore, one may argue that whether the action is appropriate is the key to an individual's decision. Ricoeur advises that when individuals exercise practical wisdom, they should keep the principle of respect for others and the rules of justice in their mind. This is very similar to the Confucian view that individual wisdom involves their knowledge to practise the virtues of *li*, *ren*, and *yi* in human relationships.

The above attempts at dialogue show that the Confucian framework is in harmony with Ricoeur's and Taylor's frameworks. A certain degree of commonality is found among the three frameworks—importance of others and ethical concerns as the focal points of interest, which allows a meaningful interlocution. At the same time, there is sufficient diversity—different directions in the discussion on the focal points of interest—to lead to new understandings of the phenomenon under examination and growth in the frameworks.

7.4 Dialogue or juxtaposition of views?

It was the aim of this chapter to engage both the western and Chinese perspectives in a dialogue to discuss the notion of self. By engaging them in a dialogue, each participant of the conversation might be able to learn from the other, and, in turn, growth in the participant would be possible.

Was juxtaposition of views rather than dialogue resulted? Before answering this question, let us first consider what make dialogue possible. To make dialogue possible, there are factors that participants need to consider.

To begin with, the participants need to be willing to listen to one another. Only by listening to the other as openly and sincerely as one can be, can the participant truly understand the other's position. To be genuinely interested in listening to the other, each participant needs to hold an assumption that at some point the other's position might be so persuasive that the participant needs to learn from the other, and this learning might lead to change. However, participants' resistance to change might prevent them from having a genuine dialogue.

Dialogue is not debate, as the purpose of debate is to defeat the other by showing the other that one's view is correct or the standard, while the other's view is not. Therefore, self-criticism is crucial for dialogue to take place. Without self-criticism, there will be no room for one to learn from the other as one already has all the right answers. Therefore, dialogue can only take place when the participants regard each other as equal. If one sees the other as inferior, there will be no dialogue, as one would believe that there is nothing worth learning from the other.

In this chapter, the Chinese perspectives were brought to the space of theoretical discussion, and these perspectives were treated as an equal partner to the western perspectives in this space with each side having its chance to express its view. Not only did they express their views, but they also exchanged and compared ideas.

However, reaching a genuine dialogue between the Chinese and the West is not easy. Considering that the West has dominated the discursive space enjoying the power for such a long time, it might be difficult for the West to see the Chinese as an equal partner in the conversation. Without regarding the Chinese as equal, it would be difficult for the West to listen to the Chinese openly and sincerely, and be willing to learn from the Chinese. If that is the case, juxtaposition rather than dialogue would be resulted.

7.5 Summary

This chapter serves as a platform for dialogues between the West—the dominant—and the Chinese—the marginalised. The dialogues have revealed what is absent in the Chinese conceptions but is vital to those western perceptions, and what is central to the former but less emphasised in the latter.

Among the five frameworks discussed, Giddens' and the Taoist frameworks stand wide apart from each other occuping the two ends of the spectrum. While Giddens' framework promotes absolute individuality, the Taoist framework encourages individuals to let go of the self and move away from self-indulgence to a concern for the other—nature. The two frameworks to a certain extent are the opposite of each other and may be seen as "*dao bu tong, bu xiang wei mou*" (Men of totally different ideology can hardly counsel together) (*Lunyu*, 15:40; in Zheng, 2007, p. 247).

The Confucian, Taylor's and Ricoeur's frameworks, however, share a lot of similarities in their focal areas while at the same time maintain their own uniqueness. All three frameworks put a strong emphasis on the ethical dimension in an individual's formation of self and regard that without ethics, there is no self. There is another point of interest that the Confucian and Ricoeur's frameworks share; they both regard relationships with others as important, though their interpretation of the notion is not completely the same.

These dialogues perhaps could serve as an example to support the argument that a non-western other is not 'an inferior West' (Said, 1978) but an equal partner to the West and can produce alternative thinking other than the dominant western thinking. In light of this alternative thinking, the West might be able to reach a new understanding of the topics that interests it.

It was the aim of this chapter to engage the western and the Chinese perspectives in dialogue for discussing the notion of self so as to reveal new insights of understanding to the notion. To make a dialogue possible, the willingness of the participants, especially the dominant participant, to let go of power and regard the other as an equal partner in the conversation is crucial. Without openness and sincerity, an intended dialogue might end up as juxtaposition of different views only, since the participants are only interested in defeating but not listening to the other's view.

Table 7.1 A dialogue from Giddens to the Chinese

Giddens	Confucian framework	Taoist framework
Self in a chaotic time		
• coherent sense of self is the solution for problems in the chaotic time	• correctness of social relationships and personal morality are the solutions	• getting rid of desires and following the patterns of nature are the solutions
Coherence and reflexivity		
• aim of the reflexive activities is to ensure an ordered life pattern of individuals	• aim of the reflexive activities is to reflect on one's relationship with others	• aim of the reflexive activities is to reflect on whether individuals follow the patterns of nature
• individuals' life choices are based on their own preference	• individuals' life choices need to be in line with *dao* (the way) of Heaven	• individuals' life choices need to be in line with *dao* (the way) of Heaven
• it is important to create a coherent sense of self	• it is important to live in harmony with others	• it is important to live in harmony with nature
Autonomy and the other		
• autonomy is for self indulgence	• autonomy is an ethical achievement	• autonomy to manifest *de* (virtues)
• others are instrumental	• self emerges only in a network of human relations; therefore, others are important and respected	• self and others are part of nature, and are equally important

Table 7.2 A dialogue from Taylor to the Chinese

Taylor	Confucian framework	Taoist framework
Moral frameworks		
• individuals need a moral framework to define their selves • individuals are 'free' to choose their own moral framework, which implies that there are more than one framework	• individuals need personal morality to define their selves • there is only one framework —*dao*, but individuals are 'free' to choose whether to follow *dao* or not	• when individuals follow the patterns of nature, they are able to 'define' their selves • there is only one framework —*dao*, but individuals are 'free' to choose whether to follow *dao* or not
Hypergoods		
• the first hypergood is benevolence, which calls upon individuals to care for justice and well-being of others	• a similar concept—*ren*—is found; it is the love and care that individuals show others and their concern for the well-being of others	• a similar concept—*ci*—is found; it is a spontaneous kindness that one shows
• the second hypergood is equal respect for all human beings	• a similar concept—*jing* (respect)—is found; *jing* is the essence of *li* (ritual propriety), one of the Five Constant Virtues • the concept of heavenly endowed nature also calls for equal respect for others	• the concepts of *yin* ('weak') and *yang* ('strong') encourage individuals to respect others • self and others are part of the integral whole—nature, thus, equal respect for others is encouraged
• the third hypergood is autonomy; to fulfil one's moral obligation, one may forgo one's autonomy	• manifesting the virtues is the prerequisite for one to enjoy 'autonomy'	• individuals' 'autonomy' is highly respected
Importance of the other		
• others serve as references for what one stands for in a society or as audiences to one's narrative, and receivers of one's moral actions	• others play an important role in helping individuals to establish their selves; in their concerns to others, individuals define who they are	• self and others are part of the integral whole—nature

Table 7.3 A dialogue from Ricoeur to the Chinese

Ricoeur	Confucian framework	Taoist framework
Relations with others		
• the theory of action shows the importance of the other in the self's formation	• individuals make sense of their selves through their regards, words and actions towards the other	• not much discussion on human relationships, except that individuals need to respect others and should not interfere with others
• three types of others: one's own body, another human being, community/social norm/social conscience	• different types of others: own body, family, country and the world • the concept of *wulun* (five cardinal relations) discusses five main prototypes of human relationships	• no discussion on different types of others
• an individual's promises imply "otherness", as the individual has the responsibility to keep his or her words to others	• being trustworthy in one's relationship with others is considered as proper fulfilment of one's duties to others	
• individuals come to know their selves when they tell others their life stories	• no discussion on how narratives help individuals make sense of their selves, but stories are often used to teach how individuals should treat others	
Self in its ethical dimension		
• narratives provide a space for individuals to evaluate their moral judgement	• narratives offer individuals a choice to consider whether they themselves are the worthy subject of a good life when they evaluate the characters' regards	• stories are used to illustrate how individuals should follow the patterns of nature
• the ethical aim for human life is to live well with and for others	• living in harmony with others is the aim for human life	• living in harmony with nature, including human beings, is the aim for human life
• sometimes individuals have to rely on practical wisdom to determine what genuine solicitude the other would require	• the concept of *yi* (appropriateness) requires individuals to consider each case and the uniqueness of the person they respond to when taking an ethical action	• when individuals follow the patterns of nature, they would respond in an appropriate manner

Table 7.4: A possible alternative dialogue—Confucians, Ricoeur and Taylor

Confucian framework	Ricoeur's framework	Taylor's framework
Relational		
• human relationship is important	• human relationship is important	• human relationship is valued but limited discussion on human relationship is provided
• the concept of *wulun* discusses different human relationships	• the notion of multiple others explores the relationship between the self and the other	
• harmonious human relationship is valued	• 'harmony' would be valued as the aim of a good life is to "live well with and for others"	
Ethical		
• individuals need to act ethically in all aspects of life	• there is an ethical aim of individuals' life	• ethics is regarded as important
• advocates Five Constant Virtues:	• discusses two chief virtues:	• discusses three hypergoods (higher-ordered life goods):
• *ren* (authoritative conduct) calls for care and concern for others	• friendship suggests a 'selfless' concern for others	• benevolence emphasises justice and the well-being of others
	• justice entails equality	
• *yi* (appropriateness) requires individuals to consider the situation at hand and their social status or roles when taking actions	• the concept of practical wisdom implies "appropriateness"	
• *li* (ritual propriety) is the external expression of the 'internal' morality and it entails *jing* (respect)	• respect for others is the pre-requisite of self respect and self-esteem	• equal respect for all human beings regardless of their race, sex, religions
		• autonomy—self-determining freedom
• *zhi* (wisdom) involves an individual's knowledge to practise *li*, *ren*, and *yi* in human relationships	• individuals need to appeal to their practical wisdom for actual application of ethics	
• *xin* (trustworthiness) is a proper fulfilment of one's duties to others	• limited discussion on trustworthiness	

Chapter 8: Implications to Relevant Research and HR Practices

8.1 Introduction

This study set out to contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding human resource management by conducting a qualitative study that included an employee's perspective. Based on the hermeneutics research approach, the study adopted in-depth interviews to collect relevant data regarding the perspectives of the Chinese employees working in MNCs on their career expectations, relationship with their supervisor and the organisation practice. The interview data were reported and an understanding of the data was sought through the western and Chinese frameworks respectively.

Based on this study, especially what the last two chapters have developed, this chapter first considers the theoretical and methodological implications for research. In the first part of the chapter, the study argues that the benefits in following ideas from non-western conceptual frameworks to interpret non-western subjects. It also proposes a new framework that encourages dialogue between western and non-western perspectives. It then calls for moving away from a self perspective to a 'self-other' perspective including "the voice of those at the receiving end" in studying human resource management issues. In the second part of the chapter, the practical implications for business practitioners are discussed and plausible suggestions for handling the HR issues identified in Chapter 2 are offered.

8.2 Theoretical and methodological implications

This part focuses on theoretical and methodological implications derived from the study which attempts to include the voice "from those at the receiving end" and the voice from the marginalised other. There are five implications. First, it proposes employing the notion of self as a conceptual lens for understanding the research subject. Second, it argues for bringing in ideas from non-western sources when interpreting non-western subjects. Third, the study suggests adopting a self-other perspective in examining human resource management issues. Fourth, it encourages a framework that includes both western and non-western perspectives in dialogue. Fifth, it shows methodologically how hermeneutics contributes to the understanding of a non-western subject.

8.2.1 Understanding the self

This study aims to examine the human resource management issues in MNCs operating in China from a Chinese employee's perspective. To understand how Chinese employees perceive and cope with the changes in the workplace, the study starts by exploring how they define and understand their selves.

The notion of self was introduced in this study as a conceptual lens through which to interpret the research subject's perception and behaviour. While the seven themes emerged from the interview data bring to light what were regarded as important by the interviewees in relation to their expatriate managers and their working life in MNCs, the data do not further explain the reasons for their importance. For example, the interview data show that job development opportunities were regarded as important by the interviewees (Section 5.3.1.1); however, it was not clear why the interviewees put such a strong emphasis on the need for development. Through the notion of self, a possible explanation on the interviewees' perception was offered. The discussion on the notion reveals that pursuing growth is essential to the self (Section 6.2.1 and Section 6.3.1), which may explain the interviewees' concern in job development opportunities and why some decided to leave when they perceived that their organistion could not offer them development opportunities.

The supervisor-supervisee relationship serves as yet another example in showing the benefits of using the notion of self as a conceptual lens for understanding the research subject. In the supervisor-supervisee relationship, the interview data show that the Chinese employees valued the trust from their supervisor and were demotivated when their supervisor did not show them trust (Section 5.2.2.2). While it might not be difficult to appreciate why the employees regarded trust from their supervisor as important, some might be puzzled by the Chinese employees' expectation on their managers to show trust to their subordinates, even before the subordinates prove themselves to be trustworthy. The notion of self helps one see a possible explanation on this seemingly unreasonable expectation. The discussion on the notion shows that the Chinese employees might perceive the supervisor and supervisee relationship as a 'solid' foundation for trust and trust may be withdrawn only when there is evidence to show that the subordinates are untrustworthy. The study shows the potential of the notion of self as providing a conceptual basis that allows for an understanding of the research subject in future research.

The study also shows that while interest in the notion of self is found in both the West and Chinese systems of thinking, there are differences between the two though there are also common focal points of interest and shared concerns. For example, Giddens' advocation of 'self-centredness' and the Taoist framework's promotion of 'letting go of the self' and 'naturalism' seem to be unique in their own frameworks. When both the West and Chinese systems of thinking were engaged in dialogue, exploring the similarities and differences between the two, new insights and understandings in the notion of self were attained, which in term enriches the understanding of the research subject—the Chinese employees working in MNCs operating in China.

8.2.2 Approaching the non-western other

The study lends support to the position of postcolonial writers that non-western subjects be allowed to speak in their own terms in order to do justice to their lived experience.

The West is often criticised by postcolonial writers (e.g. Said, 1978; Prasad, 1997, 2003) as it 'speaks for' these marginalised groups—the non-western other, as if the latter had no voice of its own. In mainstream research, researchers like March (2005) regard that there are 'context-free ideas and research subjects', western or not, can be scrutinised through the same conceptual framework based on the experience of a western subject. In other words, these marginalised groups are treated just as another set of data to validate western theories (Xu and Learmonth, 2006). Quite often, research taking such an approach only induces a partial or stereotyped view about non-western subjects. Therefore, researchers like Westwood (2001), Shih (2002), and Xu and Learmonth (2006) call for new ways to treat non-western subjects so that they can speak in their own terms.

However, it is not easy to move away from a Eurocentric approach and do justice to the non-western other by allowing the latter to speak in its own terms. At present, many cross-cultural management studies are done in a conventional way in which non-western subjects' experience is often interpreted through these western theories. For example, through a critical analysis of Redding's *The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism*, Xu (2008) reveals Eurocentric tendencies in Redding's approach in interpreting his Chinese research subject. Gamble's studies (2003, 2006) are another example. He tends to treat his research subject as another set of data to validate western theories. This approach is not just adopted by Redding and Gamble, but is also commonly found in management studies (Westwood, 2001). Following such Eurocentric approach, the voice of the non-western subject can neither be heard nor be understood as the subject is treated as an object.

To allow the voice of a non-western subject—in this study, the Chinese employees—to be heard, this study has adopted an approach which allows an indigenous conceptual framework to be brought in for understanding the phenomenon being studied. This study demonstrates that including a different conceptual framework stemming from the research subject's intellectual grounds—in this study, the Confucian and Taoist philosophical traditions—helps reach new understanding of the phenomenon under examination—the research subject's lived experience.

This study shows how Chinese conceptual frameworks help explain the behaviour of the research subject. As the literature review revealed, the expatriate management complains about their Chinese employees' lack of enthusiasm in expressing views (e.g. Gamble, 2000; Wilkinson et al., 2005). When this observation is read through a western conceptual lens, no alternative explanation, other than the existing one, could be provided to explain the behaviour. However, when the behaviour is interpreted from a Chinese perspective in an attempt to follow ideas from the Confucian and Taoist frameworks, an alternative explanation could be developed—the Chinese employees' seemingly uninterested attitude might be due to their concern for harmony (Section 6.3.3). As the Chinese employees valued harmony, they might express their ideas tactfully so as to avoid conflicts. However, as discussed in the literature review, these tactful ways of expressing ideas could be missed and misinterpreted by westerners as 'unwillingness or a lack of enthusiasm' (Section 2.2.3.4).

Interpreting the data through the Confucian and Taoist conceptual frameworks also helps explain the otherwise puzzling attitude or behaviour of the Chinese employees. For instance, the Chinese employees tended to have a high expectation of the supervisor whom they expected to show trust in the subordinate; sometimes such an expectation might be interpreted as unreasonable or unrealistic by expatriates as they perceived that the employees should prove that they are trustworthy and earn the trust from their managers. Perhaps, if one only interprets the Chinese employees' expectation from a western perspective, it might be justifiable to regard this expectation as 'unreasonable' (Section 6.2.6). However, the Confucian framework readdresses this view by providing a plausible justification for that expectation. In the Confucian framework, the supervisor and supervisee relationship—as one of *wulun* (five cardinal relationships)—serves as a foundation for trust. In this relationship, the supervisor is expected to show trust in the subordinate unless there is evidence to prove that the subordinate is untrustworthy. Therefore, following the ideas of the Confucian framework, it seems reasonable for Chinese employees to expect their managers to place trust in them (Section 6.3.6).

The study provides empirical support to the argument of Xu and Learmonth (2006) that imposing western theory or methodology on the non-western other is likely to reproduce conventional knowledge and new layers of meaning are unlikely to be added. Only when the non-western other is contextualised and allowed a place in the discursive space can new insights be gained (Xu, 2008). In this study, when the Chinese employees—the research subject—are made sense of from their own intellectual grounds, new aspects of the HR issues being studied are uncovered. Accordingly, the study calls for including non-western conceptual lens when approaching a non-western subject. By following the ideas from non-western sources when interpreting the non-western other, further insights in the phenomenon under examination may be offered and justice can be done to the other.

8.2.3 Adopting a self-other perspective

As noted, the study responds directly to the call from scholars like Clark, Mabey and Skinner (1998), who encourage the "voice of those at the receiving end" to be included in research. In mainstream research on management studies, the employees (the other) are often spoken for by the management in a position of the dominant self, as they are normally treated as an object of study. As an object, they do not have a voice and need to be represented. The management seems to think that they understand the view of their staff and they could speak for their staff. However, as revealed by the interview data, it is not the case.

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the weaknesses in methodology considered was that the majority of the studies in the existing literature were based solely on managerial responses excluding the voice of the employees. As revealed in Chapters 6 and 7, a qualitative study which includes "the voice from those at the receiving end" could offer insights to mainstream research which was mainly studied from a managerial perspective—a self perspective. These insights move beyond the views offered in mainstream research and new knowledge is thus produced. By including the employees' voice, dialogue between the management and the managed could be encouraged when scrutinising human resource management issues and further layers of meaning are uncovered.

The study therefore calls for progression from a self perspective—a managerial perspective—to a 'self-other' perspective—a perspective that is attained through the dialogue between the management (self) and the managed (other). Such a perspective gives a thorough exploration of the issues, as it includes the views of both the management and the managed. By adopting a 'self-other' perspective, researchers move away from solely concerning the perspective from the 'self'—their pre-understandings—to integrating the perspective from the 'other'—the horizons of the informants—in the research to enhance their understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

How does this 'self-other' perspective help enhance understanding? There are examples in this study that could illustrate this point. In Chapter 2, the literature review suggests that in facing severe competition among organisations for a limited supply of experienced employees, many MNCs tend to see that offering a higher salary or other cash-based compensation components would be sufficient to attract talented people and retain their experienced employees (Chiu et al., 2002; Xinhuanet, 2008). If this view is followed without question, MNCs probably would have a 'wage battle' in recruiting and retaining the talent. However, the Chinese employees in this study told a somewhat different story. The interview data revealed that offering development opportunities is probably a more effective recruitment and retention tool than offering a higher salary. When they considered a job, whether that job offered good development opportunities would affect their decision (Section 5.3.1.1). When they perceived that their job did not offer them opportunities to advance, they might consider leaving the organisation to seek another job that would offer them development opportunities. Not only is the organisation providing development opportunities perceived as important, the findings also show that when an organisation is deemed to be fair in treating its employees, it would keep its employees satisfied and might be able to retain them. This new information provided by the employees allows the management to reconsider recruitment and retention strategies they are pursuing and enable them to investigate the issues from a new perspective. (The practical implication related to this is discussed in the next section.)

The second example to demonstrate possible benefits brought by adopting a 'self-other' perspective is related to the issue of localisation. Mainstream human resource management research suggests that many MNCs need to struggle to implement their localisation plan, due to a limited supply of qualified staff and lack of support from the expatriate managers (Law et al., 2009; Selmer, 2004). Although the MNCs saw the advantages of localising their management, they could not find suitable candidates for the posts. Some researchers (e.g., Ahlstrom et al., 2001; Björkman & Lu, 1999; Wong & Slater, 2002) attributed the shortage of qualified staff to the Chinese education system and the lack of training in the areas concerned before the economic reform. The literature review also reveals that the lack of full support from expatriate managers further contributes to the difficulties of localisation. Because of their reservations about the benefits brought by localisation, expatriate managers were reluctant to help their organisation to implement its localisation plan. While these organisations worried about the problems of the shortage of qualified staff and the lack of full support from expatriate managers in their localisation plan, they might not be aware that there could be other HR problems triggered by their plan for localisation. The findings show that the Chinese employees might not share their organisation's view of the causes of the slow implementation. They suspected that their organisation did not have a genuine interest in localising its management, which generated distrust from the employees to the management of the organisation (Section 5.3.1.1). The findings reveal that the challenge brought by localisation might be bigger than MNCs realise. Similar to the previous example, this example shows that adopting a 'self-other' perspective could lead researchers to new aspects which would have been overlooked if only a self perspective is relied on. .

The picture revealed by mainstream research may not be the 'whole story' and further layers of meaning could be added when a self-other perspective is adopted. This study shows that there could be alternative explanations to what is concluded by mainstream research—studies mainly based solely on managerial responses. The data of the study uncover aspects of existing HR issues like retention and localisation. Therefore, without the 'input' from the receiving end, the management might misinterpret the human resource management issues that they need to handle, or overlook some of the aspects of the issues, and it might take the management more time to find solutions to the problems. To reach a broad understanding of the phenomenon studied, a self-other perspective is encouraged to be used in future research.

8.2.4 Experimenting with dialogues

This study is an experiment with dialogues through a new framework for relevant research. In response to postcolonial writers' call for including the voice of the non-western other, alternative conceptual framework was attempted in this study to understand the non-western research subject. However, the research framework developed here does not suggest replacing a western conceptual framework with a conceptual framework that stems from the research subject's grounds. Conventional research has been criticised for producing many monologues based on western theories or perspectives as the sole basis for interpreting non-western subjects. Replacing a western conceptual framework with a non-western conceptual one probably would repeat the same problem—producing monologues, only with a different speaker in the centre of these monologues. Therefore, the new framework developed here advocates not a substitute but an inclusion. To reach a broad understanding of the phenomenon under examination, both western and non-western conceptual frameworks should be engaged in a dialogue. Theories derived from western experience perhaps are what researchers, especially those from the West, would be familiar with; after all, western theories have dominated the research agenda for quite some time (Jack & Westwood, 2006; Prasad, 2003). These theories may serve as a starting point as the frame of reference to help researchers understand the newly introduced non-western conceptual frameworks. For example, Chinese are thought to be relational but some expatriates may fail to see why human relations are so central to them. Taylor's (1989) and Ricoeur's (1992) frameworks may be able to help these expatriates to understand this. As discussed in Chapter 6, Taylor's and Ricoeur's frameworks also show that human relations can be equally central. Both scholars see that the western-advocated independence of the self is no negation of the fact that a self only exists among other selves. The importance of others emphasised in these two frameworks could be the groundwork or 'frame of reference' for researchers, as well as practitioners, to understand the meaning of relations to the Chinese. With the 'help' of the two frameworks, they may be able to understand, for example, the notion of *wulun* discussed in the Confucian framework when interpreting the Chinese research subject's view on relationships with others.

Cross cultural management is increasingly common and important, especially in the global context. As globalisation continues, both the 'indigenous' and the 'western' sides could influence each other. It is suspected, on top of indigenous and western practices, hybrid practices might be developed. For example, the attitude demonstrated by the interviewees towards justice and *guanxi* shows some trace of hybrid practices. While embracing justice, which might be regarded as one of the most important values in the West, the Chinese employees did not completely turn their back on *guanxi*, which is seen as an important concept in the Chinese tradition. Therefore, they value an organisation's culture that strikes a balance between justice and a people-oriented culture that emphasises *renqing* (human sentiment or emotion). In other words, instead of being totally 'westernised' or insisting on preserving their 'Chineseness', these Chinese employees seek to integrate the values from both sides. Therefore, they are able to regard themselves as 'modern' (or 'westernised') without losing their inherent Chinese values. This perhaps is similar to what Bhabha (1994) describes as cultural hybridity. When one lives in the "in-between" space—space between two cultures or two value systems—one's identification goes beyond the polarities of self and other, East and West. Instead, both the self and the other give and receive from each other. Bhabha sees that in such a space, new or hybrid notions with which the self and the other can be spoken of may be found. This in fact is similar to the Taoist harmony, which encourages *ni zhong you wo, wo zhong you ni* (you are part of me, and I am part of you). In view of this, engaging ideas from both sources: western and indigenous conceptual frameworks (in this study, it is the Chinese conceptual frameworks) in the research would help researchers, as well as practitioners, recognise and make sense of hybridity. As demonstrated in the analysis of this study, interpretating the interview data through both the western and Chinese conceptual frameworks, the behaviour or attitude which perhaps not totally 'westernised" or "Chinese", could then be accounted for.

8.2.5 Relationship to hermeneutics

Methodologically, the study shows how hermeneutics could help reach a new understanding of the subject in management studies.

Hermeneutics highlights researchers' subjectivity in interpreting the findings and encourages researchers to bring in different horizons to explain findings which are different from what is 'normal' and expected. Hermeneutics acknowledges researchers' pre-understandings of the phenomenon under study are helpful for them to understand the pheonomeon; however, it also points out these pre-understandings could be a source for preventing the researchers to gain new insights into the phenomenon. It therefore challenges researchers to reflect on their own pre-understanding and encourages them to move beyond the centre—existing view—so as to rearch a new understanding. It is not the aim of this research method to confirm the existing view but to seek to articulate what generally goes unnoticed. Therefore, employing this research method, new layers of understanding on the pheonomeon would likely to be added.

Hermeneutics encourages researchers to be aware of their pre-understandings, and 'expand' their pre-understandings to allow new ideas and perspectives to be introduced. In this study, when the researcher reflected on her pre-understandings, postcolonial theory played a role in inspiring the researcher to consider the dominainting relationship between the western self and the non-western other in the previous research. Justice was not done in such a relationship, as the non-western research subject was not allowed to share power; the subject was just treated an object of study. Seeing that, existing conventional western frameworks could be possible "prejudices" that limit the understanding of the research subject, the researcher decided to move beyond these frameworks and seek alternative frameworks to make it possible for the research subject—non-western other—to become a subject rather than an object of study. Therefore, to derive a broad understanding of the subject, new ideas and interpretations which are different from the ones offered by conventional conceptual frameworks, were brought in and integrated with the pre-understanding of the researcher. By doing so, the voice of the silenced and marginalised other was brought in the discursive space. In turn, a new understanding of the subject was arrived.

8.3 Practical implications

The analysis in Chapter 6 has shed some light on how MNCs could manage their Chinese employees: they may start by overcoming the "asymmetrical understanding", which is twofold: between employees and managers; and between expatriates and the locals. While Chinese are expected to be knowledgeable about western business and culture, western managers are not normally expected to have a similar level of knowledge and understanding. To overcome the "asymmetrical understanding", expatriate managers (hereafter managers) need to allow the Chinese employees (hereafter employees) to have a place in the discursive space and understand them in their own terms. This requires managers to refrain from solely using a western lens to see their employees and strive for a broad understanding of the cultural values and social practices of these employees. For example, instead of using western standards, expatriates may need to learn the standards used by their local employees as well.

The findings suggest that managers sometimes fail to appreciate why Chinese do what they do and misinterpret the intention of their subordinates. The main reason for this is that they understand their Chinese subordinates (hereafter subordinates) from a western perspective. When western standards are regarded as the only standards, mimicry or stereotypical behaviour would very likely be the result. Mimicry encourages managers to visualise their subordinates as "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 89), regarding the employees as somewhat 'inferior' or 'less competent'. When managers in the study of Wilkinson et al. (2005) complained that the Chinese were reluctant to express opinions, or when the non-Chinese MBA students in Xu and Zhang's study (2005) expressed their dissatisfaction at their fellow Chinese students for 'keeping quiet', for example, in group discussion, these non-Chinese students might assume that Chinese should act like them: they should speak out if they have something to contribute; if not, they are not taking their responsibility nor are they doing their job right, or worse still, they are assumed to be 'incapable of independent or critical thinking'. However, as shown in the interview data, Chinese do express their opinions, but prefer to use a subtle way (Section 6.3.3). If the expatriate managers could allow 'Chinese to speak in their own terms' by trying to understand their Chinese subordinates' behaviour from these subordinates' culture, rather than using the expatriates' own standard to interpret their subordinates's behaviour, they might be able to understand and appreciate their subordinates' practice.

Stereotyping is "a reductive way of seeing the other because it denies the complexities and the play of difference within that other" (Priyadharshini, 2003, p. 174). However, it is suspected that some managers might just choose this 'convenient' way to understand their employees. Take the concept of *guanxi* as an example. Many expatriates know that the concept is important to Chinese. However, when some Chinese practise *guanxi* in an inappropriate way by 'reducing' it to bribery, some expatriates then simply conclude that *guanxi* means corruption and they have to bribe their way to successful negotiation or business with Chinese. No wonder why some researchers (e.g. Park & Luo, 2001) describe *guanxi* as "utilitarian" and "based entirely on the exchange of favors" (p. 457). However, the data from this study reveal that *guanxi* emphasises reciprocity (Section 6.3.7). When one person shows *renqing* (human sentiment or emotion), in a tangible form (e.g. gifts) or intangible form (e.g. friendship), to another person; when in difficult times, this person could ask the other person legitimately to return (*bao*) this *renqing*; this calls for long-term commitment and a bond of relationship rather than the material interest exchange (Yang, 2002). Therefore, when expatriates regard "*guanxi*" as equal to "corruption" based on their possibly partial interpretation of their experience, it is an example of stereotypying. It is precisely this stereotype that hinders the other, the Chinese, from being understood, and prevents their voice from being heard.

The discussion in Chapter 6 suggests that making reference to the Chinese subject's intellectual tradition may help managers make sense of these employees' seemingly puzzling behaviour. This calls for managers to make efforts in being sensitive to cultural values and social practices of the locals (Redding, 2003). Although the Confucian and Taoist traditions started over two thousand years ago, scholars familiar with Chinese language and culture (e.g. de Bary, 1991a; Tu, 1998) believe these traditions still play a significant role in shaping the Chinese social interaction. Yan and Sorenson (2006) argue that Confucian values are deeply rooted in Chinese society as stories, sayings, proverbs, and expressions which are used by Chinese families to implant Confucian ideals in their children. In the interviews, there is clear evidence of the influence of Confucian and Taoist values in Chinese employees, though the interviewees did not make the connection explicit. Given the plausible influence of Confucian and Taoist values shown in the findings, HR practitioners in MNCs in China may need to take these values (e.g. *ren*, *yi*, *li*, *zhi*, *xin*, *ziran* and *wuwei*) into consideration when managing Chinese employees. If they do, they probably would have new insights in developing HR policies and practices that are appropriate for the locals.

In the following sections, based on the findings of this study, practical implications on the human resource management issues related to retention, localisation and supervisor-supervisee relationship will be discussed.

8.3.1 Retention

As discussed in Chapter 2, a short supply of experienced professionals, together with a high demand of such talented people, means that competition among the companies in China was strong during the time when the interviews were conducted (i.e. 2004–2006) and there is evidence that the competition remains strong (Chang, 2010). While companies competed with each other for talent by offering appealing compensation packages, many experienced a high rate of turnover (Section 2.2.3.1 and Section 2.2.3.2). Employee turnover is very costly. Not only is there a cost implication on recruiting and retraining new staff, but there is also disruption in production. This in turn affects the business of the company. When the turnover rate is high, companies constantly deal with new people. Companies need to spend time and money to train their new staff. It also becomes difficult for companies to establish and maintain business relations both internally and externally, which in turn may affect the productivity of these companies. To avoid these problems, many companies strive to retain their experienced staff. Faced with strong competition, however, this has been a considerable challenge.

The findings show that Chinese employees tend to value development (Section 5.3.1.1), which suggests that providing development opportunities for employees may be an effective means for companies to retain their experienced staff. In fact, development could also be a tool for recruiting talent. Given that development opportunities are valued by most Chinese employees, companies providing development opportunities would be appealing to talented people in the recruiting process.

In view of the importance of development as a recruitment and retention tool, MNCs need to consider how to provide development opportunities for their staff. As the findings suggest, development opportunities mean chances for Chinese employees to learn new things, to exercise their talent and to advance to senior positions, MNCs could take the needs of their staff into consideration when designing their development plans.

As "learning new things" is perceived as significant, MNCs could increase on-the-job learning opportunities for their local staff by integrating training into their daily operations. The findings also suggest that Chinese employees value overseas work experience and knowledge; therefore, they have a strong desire to learn from expatriates—their managers or colleagues. This need could be achieved through mentoring and coaching by expatriates. While requesting their expatriate staff, especially senior staff, to serve as role models for their local staff, MNCs need to be aware that some expatriates may not be experienced in mentoring or coaching other staff (Selmer, 2004). Therefore, training in this aspect could be given to expatriates in order to help them see the importance of training their subordinates, and develop in them skills to fulfil their role as a mentor or coach. Other than in-house training, companies could consider forming partnerships with key universities to offer tailor-made training to their staff. In fact, some companies have already formed partnerships with key universities to promote their companies among graduates (Section 2.2.3.1); these companies could make greater use of the partnerships. In order to have tailor-made training, companies need to communicate with their staff and find out their training needs, especially the needs that are important for the staff to achieve their career goals.

Job swap or rotation could be a means for offering development opportunities for Chinese employees. Assigning or rotating staff into different jobs not only allows them opportunities to learn new things but also keeps the job interesting for staff. When they are assigned to or rotated into jobs that have more responsibility and are more challenging, it would give them a chance to exercise their talents. Besides, responsibility may mean that they are able to make contributions to the company and be a part of the whole. The staff may interpret this as trust from their manager and organisation (Section 5.2.2.2).

Being a part of the whole and being trusted by the management are both regarded as important (Section 6.3.4 and Section 6.3.6); therefore, this could in turn enhance staff morale as well.

MNCs could also rotate their local staff through the organisation globally giving them overseas assignments or sending them to the headquarters for a period of time. This would meet their need for gaining overseas work experience and knowledge, which locals seem to treasure the most (Section 5.3.1.1). In fact, MNCs could see this as their competitive advantage in recruiting and retaining local talents, as POEs or SOEs, at least at the time of this empirical investigation, may not be able to provide many opportunities for their staff to gain overseas work experience and knowledge.

The findings show that having chances for career advancement is perceived by locals as one type of development opportunity that could be provided by their companies (Section 5.3.1.1). If they perceive that there is little career advancement, they will leave and join another organisation. Therefore, MNCs could provide clear information about the career paths showing their employees how they could advance their careers. Besides, companies could consider offering more internal promotions rather than external recruitment in order to create career growth for their employees. However, while some MNCs may recognise the importance of career advancement for local staff, they argue that their staff do not possess the skills and knowledge to hold senior positions (Section 2.2.3.3). Therefore, to help local employees advance in their career, MNCs could provide leadership development. Such development would help the staff developing skills and knowledge needed for senior positions. Through this development, MNCs could nurture their own staff and develop in them the mind-set, skills and cultural alignment that the organisations may require.

Providing staff with development opportunities is probably a common HRM practice in the West. However, MNCs operating in China may need to consider introducing a new element when they exercise this practice in their China subsidiaries. As suggested in the findings, many Chinese employees would like to see their managers take an active role in their development; regarding it as the obligation of their manager (Section 6.3.5). Therefore, MNCs may need to develop policy to encourage their managers to take a leading role in formulating development plans for their subordinates preparing them for career advancement. When deriving plans, managers could take the employees' career interests, and their abilities and performance into consideration. This could be done through career-oriented appraisals. It is important, however, to point out that the burden of staff development planning should not be solely shouldered by the manager; the subordinate himself or herself could be encouraged to create a plan jointly with the manager. The joint effort of both manager and subordinate are needed so the development plan can meet the needs of the organisation and the subordinate.

Another crucial finding in this study is the importance of fairness exercised in organisations (Section 5.3.1.2). Most Chinese employees regarded fairness as important. Since fairness is an important quality in the West, the expatriate management should be able to appreciate their employees' wish to see fairness being exercised in the organisation (Section 6.2.6). Therefore, MNCs could show fairness when providing development opportunities for their expatriate and local staff. To convince their employees that locals are treated fairly, they may need to consider making the related policies and selection criteria transparent as far as possible so as to minimise the perceived favouritism. Sharing information about the organisation's policies with local employees would help convince them that fairness is exercised in the organisation; and by showing fairness, trust from the staff could also be generated, which in turn encourages strong employees' commitment (Wong et al., 2006).

After revealing the importance of development as a retention and recruitment tool and suggesting ways to provide development to attract and retain local staff, it is important to point out that money is still important. As clearly indicated in the interview data, many Chinese employees were still sensitive to economic motivation. Therefore, on top of providing development opportunities, MNCs could continue to monitor the market on salary and respond quickly by constantly finding a way to have an edge over the salary packages offered in the market in order to attract and retain talented people.

The findings suggest that Chinese consider the organisation showing care and concern as crucial and the employees' morale was high when they perceived that the organisation *you renqing* (have kindness, humanity) (Section 5.2.2.1). MNCs could make use of this to retain their staff. They could consider introducing employee assistance programmes, especially health plans, since medical expenses in China can be quite high. Housing allowances provided and housing loan interest paid by the company, which have been implemented by some MNCs, are also good ways for MNCs to show their *renqing*. They could also provide their staff with a family package of medical care, as family relationships are perceived as important in Chinese culture (Section 6.3.5). Such package may be extended to family members other than the spouse and children of the employees, such as parents, grant parents and dependent siblings.

8.3.2 Localisation

A major challenge in human resource management faced by MNCs is localisation. As discussed in Chapter 2, there are many benefits brought by localisation. On top of those benefits, as hinted in the findings, there are other upsides offered by localisation. One of them is that localisation may help MNCs establish a good relationship with their employees and this relationship could cultivate commitment from local employees. Localisation shows that the MNC has a long-term commitment to its local employees, as well as the host country. Providing local employees with opportunities for career advancement proves that the organisation does not regard its employees as cheap labour, as some locals might suspect. On the contrary, it values its local employees and is willing to develop them into long-term strategic resources for the company. The commitment shown by the organisation would result in a mutual commitment from its local employees as Chinese value the concept of *bao* (pay back) (Section 5.2.2.1). In Chinese culture, individuals are expected to remember others' good deeds and to pay back the 'debt' whenever it is possible.

Localisation also helps demonstrate that fairness is exercised in the organisation. One of the complaints made by the interviewees is the different treatments of locals and expatriates in promotion (Section 5.3.1.2). Localisation would enable a company to offer opportunities to employees for career advancement. When more locals are promoted to senior managerial or executive positions, employees may be able to see there is no 'glass ceiling' in their organisations and the locals are treated fairly in their promotion. Some may even be motivated when they see these successful stories of advancement. Conversely, when the key management posts are occupied by expatriates, employees would very likely think that the organisation favours its expatriates.

Many MNCs may argue that given the benefits brought by localisation, they also want to localise their management, but the limited number of qualified people makes it difficult for them to do so (Section 2.2.3.3). Therefore, they may claim that there is no 'glass ceiling' for local employees. Perhaps, the 'glass ceiling' is only a misperception of the locals, and the MNCs do not have any different treatment between the locals and expatriates in promotion. However, why did some Chinese employees believe that there is a 'glass ceiling' in their career ladder? There are some possible reasons. First, it might be because the Chinese employees found that there were extremely few, if any, Chinese holding senior management posts (Section 5.3.1.2). When there were so few successful cases, the employees might suspect that they would not be considered for key management posts. If MNCs could first establish career paths to senior positions with clear promotional standards and make these paths and standards transparent, local employees may be able to see that they are not promoted because they have not reached these standards—not because of the 'glass ceiling'. Besides, knowing the promotional standards would give locals a direction for improvement if they want to be promoted; they would understand how to develop themselves for the promotion. Better still, MNCs could derive development plans to help their Chinese employees overcome their insufficiency. By doing so, MNCs would resolve two matters with a single action: through the development plans, MNCs could overcome the lack of qualified talent for more senior managerial positions, and they could demonstrate to the locals that the 'glass ceiling' might be a myth.

Second, MNCs may want to keep expatriates at certain posts as part of their strategic human resource management practices (Section 2.2.3.3). When there is only limited number of key management posts for locals, Chinese employees may feel that they work under a 'glass ceiling'. If this is the reason for the perceived 'glass ceiling', MNCs may need to explain to their employees and lay out the career tracks to senior positions to them so as to convince the locals that there is promotion opportunities for them.

Third, another reason for the existence of the perceived 'glass ceiling' is that MNCs do not show to their Chinese employees any plan for localising their top management (Section 5.3.1.1). Not being able to see the plan for localisation, the local employees might doubt whether the MNCs have any intention for implementing such a policy. Therefore, sharing the plan for localisation with local employees would help them see the fairness in the promotion. MNCs need to communicate with their employees what posts would be eventually shifted from expatriates to locals. They also need to make plans to develop successors for these posts by providing appropriate training and support to them.

Localisation seems to provide excellent opportunities for the Chinese employees who want to seek growth in their work. However, in order to implement localisation successfully, MNCs not only need to prepare their Chinese employees for the placement but also truly empower them. Sometimes, the implementation of localisation is not successful because MNCs assign duties, but not authority, to their local staff (Section 5.2.2.2). The reluctance of transferring authority not only has negative impact on the organisation's plan for localisation, but also undermines the morale of the Chinese employees. As suggested in the findings, when there is trust from the organisation, many employees would be more willing to strive for their best in their work (Section 5.2.2.2). Therefore, when MNCs decide to appoint their local employees to responsible posts, they could trust these employees by transferring authority to them.

There is another possible obstacle for localisation. As suspected by some Chinese employees, in the long-term, it might not be to the interest of expatriate managers to help develop or provide support to their subordinates to take up the responsible posts. The expatriates may fear that they would be replaced by local managers and end up losing their jobs (Section 5.3.1.1). Therefore, to ensure the success of their localisation plan, MNCs need to have repatriation plans for their expatriate managers. With reasonable repatriation arrangements, expatriate managers might be motivated to help implement the localisation plan.

8.3.3 Supervisor-supervisee relationship

The findings of this study reveal that *guanxi* (relation) is important to employees, despite its downsides (Section 5.4.1.1), and harmonious relationships are highly valued by Chinese (Section 5.2.1.1). Researchers like Tjosvold and Wong (2000) support that effective relationship motivate employees to perform effectively. Wong et al. (2001) discuss the concept of reciprocity in Chinese culture and suggest that when a harmonious relationship is nurtured between the manager and the subordinate, the subordinate would tend to show loyalty and commitment to the manager. The findings also suggest that the employee-manager relationship is crucial to retention in China. If the employee has a good working relationship with the manager, he or she is reluctant to leave the company (Section 5.2.2.1). Given the importance of *guanxi* and the possible benefits brought by *guanxi*, expatriate managers could try their best to establish a good working relationship with their subordinates. The following sections will provide expatriate managers with some ideas about what they could do to cultivate this relationship.

8.3.3.1 Care and concern

Given that Chinese employees value *renqing* (kindness, humanity) and have a high expectation that their managers will show care and concern to them (Section 5.2.2.1), and that whether their expatriate managers are perceived as caring or not affects employees' morale, managers could do something to show their care. They could find ways to create a supportive atmosphere in the workplace.

Supportive managers would have a genuine interest in their subordinates—taking time to get to know them individually including their potential, career goals, and even their personal life, if appropriate. Knowing the staff better, especially their strengths and weaknesses, managers would be able to find the most appropriate staff for the assignments, and thus achieve optimal performance. More importantly, showing real interest in the subordinates can demonstrate the care of the managers, which makes the subordinates feel valued, thereby generating employee loyalty.

Helping the subordinates reach their career goals by exerting their potential is also what supportive managers could do. They could take an active role in their subordinates' career and development planning, serving as a mentor or trainer of their subordinates. They could also give adequate and timely feedback to their subordinates on what they have done right and what improvement is needed. Perhaps besides annual performance appraisal, managers could arrange regular meetings with their subordinates discussing the subordinates' work. They could help the subordinates evaluate their own performance and identify areas for improvement. They could also give their subordinates chances, such as new work tasks or more responsibilities, to reach their potential.

Given that the role of family is crucial to Chinese, demonstrating genuine care towards an employee's family would win the respect from the employee. Respected managers prompt employee cooperation (Wright et al., 2008). When an employee faces some family crisis, the manager could show compassion and empathy for the employee. They could also consider whether actual help could be provided. For example, they could consider whether special arrangements could be made in the subordinate's work allowing him or her some time to handle the family matters.

However, after saying that, it is important to point out that expatriates and locals view individuals' privacy differently. On some occasions, expatriates may regard individuals' privacy as being violated if they insist on offering help (Section 6.2.5); whereas locals may consider individuals do not have *renqing* if they do not provide a reasonable degree of help (Section 6.3.5). Therefore, more communication could be encouraged to help both expatriates and locals see each other's view. By understanding each other's view and position, a balance between showing concern and respecting privacy might be able to reach. To strike a balance, it may involve resetting the boundary of privacy for both expatriates and locals. Expatriates might need to allow some flexibility in drawing the boundary. Perhaps, instead of having a clear and rigid separation between 'privacy' and 'work', expatriates could at least show appreciation to the locals when they offer help in their personal life. If appropriate, they could allow their local employees to know or even include the employee in their personal life. For the locals, they might need to respect the fact that there is a boundary between a person's private and working life and they need to respect the boundary set by the other and should not go beyond the boundary (e.g. insisting on offering help) without an invitation. At the same time, they may need to adjust their expectation on how their managers show their care and concern. When the managers do not offer the kind of help that they expect, it might be because their managers see that offering help in such a way means invading the subordinates' privacy.

8.3.3.2 Mutual respect

The findings suggest that having respect from their manager is important for Chinese employees (Section 5.2.1.2). If Chinese employees feel that they are not respected, it may affect the relationship with their manager.

Considering that for Chinese the notion of face is closely related to the notion of respect (Section 6.3.4), managers may need to be cautious not to damage their subordinates' face. Oblivious managers may easily cause locals to lose face when implementing polices. Therefore, it may be helpful for expatriate managers to have more communication with the local staff when formulating policies. For example, they could ask the staff for comments in informal occasions. Through communication with the locals, they might be able to avoid formulating policies that could damage their subordinates' face. If managers could find ways to 'give' face to their subordinates when they manage these employees, it would be even better.

As part of employee training, managers are encouraged to give feedback to their subordinates helping them see what they have done well and what needs to be improved. Given that Chinese employees tend to be face-conscious, managers could consider giving pubic recognition of employees' achievements. Perhaps, they could do that by making an announcement in the staff meeting. While praising employees publicly for their achievement or finishing a task up to the expectation of the manager could enhance employee morale, pointing out their mistakes or reprimanding them in public may mean 'loss of face' to these employees. Therefore, when managers need to communicate with their subordinates what they have done wrong, the managers could do it privately so as to save their subordinates' face. They could give feedback to their subordinates in one-to-one communication behind the door, rather than doing it in a group.

Saving Chinese employees' face not only could help establish a good supervisor-supervisee relationship, it may also reduce the fear of responsibility among local employees. Some managers criticise local employees for being risk averse; that is, avoiding personal responsibility for solving problems (Section 2.2.3.4). For Chinese employees, acceptance of responsibility may risk losing face when there is failure. However, if Chinese subordinates see that their managers show respect to them by paying attention to their face concern as well as providing support, perhaps they would not have so much hesitation when taking responsibility.

While expatriates need to be aware of the face concern of the locals and try to be careful not to damage the face of the locals, the locals perhaps could be less sensitive to the face issue. The locals need to recognise that some expatriates may tend to be straight-forward in their communication; however, it does not mean that they disrespect the Chinese employees.

It is also important that expatriate managers show equal respect to their Chinese subordinates. It is true that most of the time, Chinese employees would show respect to their supervisors, and even when they have disagreement with their managers they would use a non-confrontational way to handle the situation (Section 5.2.1.1). However, as pointed out by the interviewees, when the manager is perceived to have acted against *li* and disrespected his or her subordinate first, and his or her behaviour has pushed the subordinate over the edge, the subordinate may withdraw the respect for authority and confront the manager, even in public (Section 5.2.1.2). It seems that the root of the problems lies in the attitude of expatriates, at least in the eyes of the locals. If managers could recognise that even their subordinates hold less senior positions in the company, as individuals, these employees have the right to enjoy equality, then managers would be able to give the employees respect.

8.3.3.3 Harmony rather than uniformity

Another implication of the findings is expatriate managers need to handle the situation carefully when they have different views from those of their employees (Section 5.2.1.1). Given that Chinese tend to value harmony and are face-conscious, and that a non-harmonious relationship with their managers would affect employee performance and satisfaction, expatriate managers need to be careful not to turn a disagreement into a confrontation and try their best to establish a harmonious working environment.

The findings show that the employees see that direct conflict would hurt relationships, so, in order to avoid confrontation, some of them would use different tactics such as suppressing their ideas to conform to the managers' view or working behind the manager's back to get what these employees want (Section 5.2.1.1). These tactics do not encourage genuine communication or cooperation between the manager and the subordinate, thus they may hinder the supervisor-supervisee relationship.

Managers may need to help their employees see that they understand and share the Confucian view that disagreements may not end up as conflicts and different views should be valued (Section 7.3.2.1). In order to show that, managers could encourage more communication and provide chances for employees to discuss their views. It is important that managers listen to these different ideas and suggestions from the employees and try to incorporate them into the decisions as far as possible. Research has shown that the open-minded discussion of different views, called constructive controversy, could encourage cooperation, bring mutual benefits, and result in productive work (Tjosvold

1998, Tjosvold and Wong, 2000). When Chinese employees see that they could be more direct in expressing their ideas without hurting the relationship and their views are valued, perhaps they would change their style over time and be more willing to give their views in a less subtle way.

8.3.3.4 Trust in employees

The findings suggest that it is important for managers to build up a trusting relationship with their local employees (Section 5.2.2.2). As Wong et al. (2006) point out, trust plays an important role in engendering employee commitment. While employees' trust in the supervisor is important and can be gained by the supervisor being fair in handling staff issues, the trust from the supervisor in his or her subordinates is also crucial. As shown in the findings, if the supervisor places trust in the subordinates, their self-confidence and morale would be boosted and they would be more committed to their work.

To show trust to their employees, managers may consider how to empower their subordinates. They could give the subordinates clear directional guidance to help them do the job and then give them room to decide how to finish the task. The employees may regard that managers constantly monitoring the subordinates' work and requesting them to report every single detail only demonstrates the supervisor's distrust of the employees (Section 5.2.2.2). When the employees perceive that their supervisors do not trust them, it would affect their enthusiasm in their job.

However, expatriate managers need to be careful when they empower their subordinates. While trusting them with the job and allowing them room to make decisions for the job, expatriates need to 'stay involved' by being visible and accessible when their subordinates require guidance and help. If they do not stay involved, their subordinates may see that they are not supportive and do not care about their subordinates. Therefore, they need to strike a balance between placing trust in their subordinates and providing them with support.

It is important, however, to point out that the subordinates also need to find ways to prove to their managers that they are trustworthy. While the supervisor and supervisee relationship—as one of *wulun* (five cardinal relationships)—serves as a foundation for trust (Section 6.3.4), trust needs to be renewed continuously. When the subordinates persist in showing their trustworthiness, not only trust is renewed, but also the relationship between the two is strengthened.

8.4 Summary

This chapter has discussed the theoretical and methodological implications for relevant research. While continuing the critique of representation of the other by the dominant party, the chapter has argued for the importance of moving away from a one-sided perspective and towards a 'self-other' perspective in doing researcha. It has shown how bringing "the voice of those from the receiving end" could help researchers understand the phenomenon under study. It has also proposed a new framework that allows an indigenous conceptual lens to be introduced for understanding the phenomenon being studied. Such a framework would allow the voice of a non-western subject to be heard. It has also argued that an integration regardingresearch framework that allows dialogues between western and non-western perspectives that could help researchers derive a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

In the second part of the chapter, the practical implications for business practitioners have been considered suggesting plausible ways to handle the previously identified HR problems retention, localisation, and supervisor-supervisee relationship. The ways suggested are based on the employees' views, and these ways could be some what different from how problems are handled at the moment in MNCs, as the solutions adopted are mainly based on the management perspective (Chapter 2). With the input from the employees, more possible ways to handle the problems could be derived.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This study set out to understand Chinese employees working in MNCs that operate in China. It was evident that because these employees—the non-western other—were often reduced to an object of management, the employees' voice was ignored. To recover the voice which was previously absent, the non-western other needs to be translated into the self and treated as a subject. Therefore, this study attempted to let the employees speak for themselves and in their own terms. To do so, the research was studied from an employee's perspective rather than a managerial perspective, and Chinese conceptual frameworks were introduced to understand the Chinese research subject.

Drawing on the notion of self from both western and Chinese perspectives, the study showed that misunderstanding and misinterpretation might arise from asymmetries in cultural understanding. It argued that meaningful dialogues could occur only when the voice of the non-western other is brought from being marginal to the centre of the conversation, and both the western self and the non-western other have a place in the discursive space of theoretical discussion to give voice. It also warned that without openness and sincerity, an intended dialogue might end up as just juxtaposition of the different views.

In this study, dialogues took place between the western self and the non-western other—the Chinese—at three levels. On the practical level, the dialogue took p lace among the practitioners: expatriate managers whose views were expressed in the literature review and local employees in MNCs located in China. The dialogue also took place in the research communities on theoretical and methodological levels. There was evidence to show that meaningful dialogues could be achieved at all three levels when both parties were engaged and allowed to be equal partners in the discursive space.

This chapter provides a conclusion for this thesis. First, an overview of the study is provided highlighting the findings and discussions; second, major contributions are described; third, the limitations of this study are discussed. Finally, suggestions for further research are put forward.

9.2 Overview of this study

An overview of the study is given below to recap the important features of each chapter before describing the major contributions of this study.

Chapter 1 provided background to the study. The chapter showed that with the steady economic growth and a large domestic market, China became an attractive destination for foreign direct investment (FDI). As a result, many multi-national corporations (MNCs) found ways to infiltrate the China market. However, "asymmetrical understanding" was observed between expatriates and locals. In many situations, the perspective of Chinese employees was ignored and their voice marginalised. Under such a background, it was proposed that an empirical study that investigates cross-cultural human resource issues from an employee's perspective would help enhance the expatriate management's understanding of their local employees.

The relevant existing literature was reviewed and evaluated in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 discussed the practices of managing Chinese employees, which provided information for understanding the context of this study. A critical evaluation uncovered three major drawbacks in the existing literature. First, only a limited amount of research was conducted in the recent period after China's entry into the WTO. Second, there were few qualitative studies that provided in-depth analysis about the issues related to managing Chinese employees. Third, the majority of the previous research was based solely on managerial responses, and it excluded the "voice of those at the receiving end"—employees. This exclusion contributed to an "asymmetrical understanding" of the issues. The drawbacks justified that an empirical study employing qualitative methodology would contribute to the existing literature. It was argued that this study designed to explore cross-cultural human resource issues from an employee's perspective would help overcome the "asymmetrical understanding".

Chapter 3 provided a discussion on the notion of self from both western and Chinese perspectives. The discussion started from a familiar perspective arising from the West and later moved to an unfamiliar perspective provided by Chinese philosophical traditions. In the first half of the chapter, the key concepts in the frameworks of Anthony Giddens (1991), Charles Taylor (1989) and Paul Ricoeur (1992) were discussed. The discussion showed that there might be limitations if the Chinese subjects were interpreted only through the western conceptual frameworks. Therefore, Chinese conceptual frameworks were introduced to allow the subjects to speak in their own terms. In the second half of the chapter, the key concepts of the frameworks from two distinct Chinese traditions, the Confucian and the Taoist philosophical traditions, were discussed.

Chapter 4 mapped out the research method utilised in this study. It was argued that as this study attempted to bring in unfamiliar perspectives—perspectives from "the receiving end" and Chinese conceptual frameworks—a research method that encourages adopting different perspectives would be considered appropriate for the study. Considering its prominent characteristic—the freedom to adopt different perspectives to inquiry and to engage these perspectives in dialogue, a hermeneutic research method was adopted. A six-stage hermeneutic research framework proposed by Cole and Avison (2007) was discussed, and the framework was followed when collecting data from the research subject through in-depth interviews. Postcolonial theory was introduced to help reflect on pre-understandings of the researcher and make room for alternative perspectives. In line with the prominent characteristic of hermeneutics, postcolonial theory encourages multiple voices including voices from the marginalised groups. The chapter also listed the interview questions used to seek answers for the key research question: How do Chinese employees make sense of their selves in relation to their expatriate managers and their work life in MNCs? Towards the end of the chapter, a brief account on the research procedure was given.

Chapter 5 presented the findings of the interviews with 27 Chinese employees working in MNCs—eleven were female and 16 were male. Their ages ranged from the mid-20s to mid-40s. Eighteen interviewees were from Beijing and nine from Guangzhou. When examining the interview data, seven prominent themes emerged. In the supervisor-supervisee relationship, the interviewees brought up four topics: "a harmonious relationship", "care and concern", "respect", and "trust". In relation to their job and career expectation, the interviewees discussed "development" and "fairness". Regarding the practice of their organisations, the interviewees raised the topic of "less complicated human relations in MNCs".

The seven themes were interpreted in Chapter 6—first from a western perspective, then from a Chinese perspective. The discussion in the chapter showed that while interpreting the interview findings through Giddens', Taylor's and Ricoeur's frameworks might help make sense of the interviewees' views on the themes to a certain degree, there is a limit. When the findings were interpreted again through the Confucian and Taoist frameworks, further layers of meaning were offered. New layers of understanding in the areas, such as the non-confrontational attitude of Chinese employees in handling disagreement and the importance of protecting face to Chinese employees, were recovered by following ideas from Chinese sources.

Chapter 7 serves as a space for dialogue on the notion of self between the western self and the non-western other—in this study, 'the Chinese'. In the first half of the chapter, the dialogues between the two followed a conventional way and were led by the scholars in the West, whereas in the second half of the chapter, the dialogue was led by 'the Chinese'. When Giddens' an d the Chinese conceptual frameworks were engaged in dialogue, it was found that there were more differences between them than shared similarities. In particular, Giddens' framework and the Taoist framework could be perceived as occupying the two ends of a continuum; while Giddens' framework encourages absolute individuality, the Taoist framework promotes a certain 'selflessness'. When Taylor's, Ricoeur's and the Chinese philosophical frameworks were put into dialogue, it was revealed that these frameworks shared common concerns in many issues, though they still have quite different interpretations and foci on major topics. The discussion allows one to see the limit of relying on the conventional conceptual frameworks to interpret the Chinese subjects. If western conceptual frameworks alone were applied, many layers of meaning would be missed or misinterpreted.

The theoretical, methodological and practical implications of the empirical study were offered in Chapter 8. For theoretical implications, drawing on the notion of self, the study revealed the limit of western conceptual frameworks and illustrated the benefits of introducing Chinese conceptual frameworks. Regarding methodology, the study supports the argument of postcolonial writers that non-western subjects should be allowed to speak in their own terms, so as to do justice to the lived experience of these subjects. Considering that the 'self' is constituted by being in relation with the 'other', this study proposes a self-other integration perspective for future research for cross-cultural management research. As for practical implications, plausible answers to the human resource problems related to recruitment, retention, localisation, and the supervisor-supervisee relationship were discussed.

Finally, this chapter—Chapter 9—concludes the thesis by recapping the main features of the whole study, describing the major contributions, discussing the limitations of the work and providing suggestions for future research directions.

9.3 Contributions

This thesis has three major contributions to cross-cultural management studies.

First, this thesis contributes to theoretical knowledge by scrutinising the notion of self from both the Western and the Chinese perspectives. By engaging the two perspectives in dialogue, similarities and differences in the focal points of interest between the two were found. Through examining the similarities and differences between the two perspectives, the limitations of researchers following ideas from the western sources in interpreting the Chinese subjects were revealed, and the benefits of following ideas from Chinese sources were shown. The attempt at interpreting the data from a Chinese perspective uncovered further layers of understanding about the Chinese subjects; these layers would be missed if western conceptual frameworks alone were relied on.

Second, the study contributes insights into research methodology. The empirical study lends support to the argument of postcolonial writers that non-western subjects should be allowed to speak in their own terms so that justice could be done to the lived experience of these subjects. Postcolonial theory combats the residual effect of colonialism on cultural studies and protests that the voices of non-western others have been previously silenced by dominant ideologies. In response to the argument put forward by postcolonial writers, this study attempts to provide a solution to the problem by experimenting with alternative frameworks so as to condition dialogues. The study proposes introducing non-western conceptual frameworks to understand the non-western subjects. The study also proposes a self-other integration in research. Instead of just concerning the perspective from the western self, it is argued and supported to be beneficial that the perspective from the non-western other can be integrated in research to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon under examination. In line with the fusion of horizons in hermeneutics, this self-other integration calls for researchers to take a bi-lateral approach in interpreting non-western subjects when formulating the conceptual framework, which means moving beyond the dominant western conceptual frameworks, which may contribute to the "prejudices" that hinder the understanding of the subjects, and including non-western conceptual frameworks to enrich the understanding.

Third, this study contributes to the understanding of human resource management issues related to MNCs operating in China. Through Chinese employees' narration of their experience in the workplace, the human resource management issues were able to be examined from a Chinese employee's perspective instead of a managerial perspective. Therefore, new insights are gained into managing Chinese employees and plausible solutions to the human resource problems related to recruitment, retention, localisation, and the supervisor-supervisee relationship are considered. These solutions require both managers and employees to make an effort in understanding each other's perspectives.

9.4 Limitations

This study has four major limitations. The first limitation is related to the period that the interviews were conducted. One probably would agree that China has been changing very fast, including economic, political and social aspects. As the interviews were conducted between 2004 and 2006, there could be many differences between the environment in China four years ago and that in 2010. For example, the problems faced by management four years ago could have been solved or could have become more severe. While some problems may remain unsolved, there could be new problems too. Additionally, some of the views and attitude of Chinese employees could have changed. While the findings of this study provide some insights on how the expatriate management could manage their local staff, some of the findings may not be fully applicable to the work environment today.

The second limitation is related to the number of cities in which the interview data were collected. China is a vast country in which many groups of people live. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that the culture and practice would vary from province to province, city to city and from the urban to rural areas. These variations could be seen across a spectrum of activities, from the way they treat one another to work habits, how they set their priorities, what they value the most, or even how they spend their time. In this study, interviews were conducted in two cities only—namely, Beijing and Guangzhou. The views of Chinese employees from other major cities, such as Shanghai and Chongqing[20], may be different from the views of those from Beijing and Guangzhou. For example, when asked about their reason for joining an MNC, they could regard a high salary package as the most important reason. Therefore, representativeness of the answers given by the research subject of this study might be limited, and the suggestions recommended in this study may be less relevant to the MNCs operated in these cities.

A third limitation is that the number of interviewees involved was not large enough to allow for a conclusive comparison between groups classified by, for example, age or gender. Only simple comparisons describing the tendency, such as "older interviewees tended to value harmony more than younger interviewees did" (section 6.2.1.1) or "female interviewees showed more interest in the issue of care and concern" (Section 6.2.2), were made in this study. Besides, due to the small number of interviewees involved in this study, the interviewees could only be classified into two age groups: "older" and "younger", instead of fine classifications like "20–29", "30–39" and "40–49".

20 Chongqing is a major city in southwestern China.

Therefore, whether there are differences among these groups could not be revealed in this study.

The fourth limitation is related to the dialogue between the management and the managed. In this study, the voice of the management is acquired from the existing literature, whereas the voice of the managed—the receiving end—is provided through the interviews that allows the managed to 'speak back' to the management. Although dialogue is encouraged in this study, the dialogue is probably still in its early stage, as the exchanges in the conversation between the management and the managed are yet to come. Perhaps further layers of understanding of human resource issues could be explored when these exchanges are allowed.

Although there are limitations in this study, they should not detract from the value of the study, which shows the benefits of bringing the voice of the other in dialogue. Therefore, the limitations could be treated as challenges for future research.

9.5 Directions for future research

As pointed out in Section 9.4, China is a relatively fast-changing country and it is suspected some of the changes that the country has experienced would have some impact on human resource practices in MNCs. Considering that some of the findings of this study might not be fully applicable to the work environment today, since the interviews were conducted some years ago, updated investigations of the practices would be helpful.

In future studies, Chinese employees working in MNCs in other cities could be interviewed. Research could be done in other cities like Shanghai and Shenzhen, which have a similar history of foreign investment to Beijing and Guangzhou. However, most likely the culture and practices in these cities are different from those of Beijing and

Guangzhou. Research could also be conducted in second-tier cities like Chongqing and Dalian, whose wider context, including the competition among companies and the work skills and experience of the people, could be different from that of Beijing and Guangzhou. Information collected in these cities could contribute to the understanding of the Chinese subjects.

Further studies on a larger scale could allow researchers to gain more information for comparing different groups of local employees, and as such significant differences among the groups, if any, could be revealed. Besides, when the studies are conducted on a larger scale, fine classifications could be used to divide the Chinese research subject. For example, the research subject could be divided into finely defined age groups (e.g. 20–24) instead of broadly defined age groups (e.g. 'young'). Such finer classifications would allow researchers to make in-depth comparisons and discussion on the characteristics of their research subjects. China has been opened to the West for a few decades, and it is suspected that compared with older generations, younger generations are now more familiar with and receptive to the practice of the West. Studies on a larger scale could provide more information to find out, for example, how younger generations—like 'post-seventies generation' or 'post-eighties generation'—handle their relationship with their expatriate managers, and how these generations adopt ways different from those used by older generations who w ere born in the fifties or sixties. This might add layers of understanding about the subjects.

In conducting such studies, it is important that an approach that aims to integrate self and other is attempted. Future research might be directed towards involving more dialogues between the management and the managed. Although it probably is not practical to interview managers and their subordinates on the same occasion, researchers could still include both the managerial and employee perspectives in their studies. To encourage more exchanges between the two groups, researchers could interview one group (e.g.

employees) first and then relay the views of this group to the other group (e.g. managers). After that, researchers could then communicate the response of the second group to the first group, and so forth. Through this spiral approach, in which data are evolved by cycling the interviews a few times, further new insights into and understanding of the phenomenon studied might be achieved.

In cross-cultural management research, this study may be an initial attempt to explore the importance of non-western conceptual frameworks in understanding non-western subjects. However, in cultural studies, postcolonial writers have long been advocating moving away from Eurocentric attitudes and allowing non-western subjects to speak in their own terms. Inspired by the argument of the postcolonial writers, this study introduced non-western conceptual frameworks to understand the non-western subjects and new insights into the phenomenon under examination were offered. Considering the possible benefits of knowledge gained when such approach is attempted, cross-cultural management researchers are encouraged to move away from doing research in a conventional way—attempting to interpret the non-western subjects by using conceptual frameworks developed from the West. Instead, they should bring in ideas from non-western sources to understand their non-western subjects. By doing so, they could avoid reducing their non-western subjects to objects and allow the voices of their non-western subjects to be heard and understood.

As illustrated in this study, the dialogue between the western self (western perspectives) and the non-western other (non-western perspectives) would allow researchers to uncover further layers of meaning, which might be missed if non-western conceptual frameworks are not introduced. Therefore, such self-other integration could be pursued in future research. While western conceptual frameworks—the frameworks that researchers probably are more familiar with—help researchers understand their research subjects to a certain extent, non-western conceptual frameworks could supplement western frameworks by adding layers to the understanding of the subjects.

A closing remark...

At the beginning of this thesis, it argued that the problem of "asymmetrical understanding" was observed in the cross-cultural workplace and cross-cultural management research. To overcome the "asymmetrical understanding", this study proposes having a dialogue between the self and the other. While it is seemingly a straightforward solution, it may have another crucial issue that needs to be considered. To make a genuine dialogue possible, it is important that "asymmetrical power" is overcome. "Asymmetrical power" dictates whether the voices of the other can genuinely be heard. The one with more power could deny or suppress the voices of the other, who has less power in the relationship. Therefore, to overcome "asymmetrical understanding", it requires researchers to treat their non-western research subjects, as well as expatriate managers to treat their Chinese employees, as equal partners in the encounter by letting them speak for themselves.

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Glossary of Key Confucian and Taoist Concepts

A. Confucian concepts

Dao	The human way; refers to "noble way" of personal conduct in life
De	Virtue; includes ethics like *ren* (authoritative conduct), *yi* (appropriateness), *li* (ritual propriety), *zhi* (wisdom), and *xin* (trustworthiness)
Jing	Respect; the core of *li*, when individuals respect the worth of others, they can then act according to *li*
Junzi	A virtuous person; a person that has high moral standards
Li	Ritual propriety; to live up to demands of *li* means more than simply following ceremonies by rote, but also doing them with proper reverence
Ren	Authoritative conduct; to be a person with *ren* requires a long self-cultivation process
Shu	empathy, reciprocity; it means not to bring harm on others
Wulun	Five cardinal relations; relations between a ruler and a subject (superior and subordinate), father and son (parent and child), husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother (siblings), and friends
Xiao	Filial piety; refers to love and respect for the parents, elders and ancestors
Xiaoren	A mean-spirited person; a person who does not follow *dao* but seeks only immediate personal gains
Xin	Trustworthiness; the Confucian concept to describe individuals who can be trusted to fulfil their proper ethical obligations
Yi	Appropriateness; a judgment appropriate to the situation at hand and individuals' social status or roles
Zhi	Wisdom; refers to one's knowledge about human relationships
Zhong	Sincerity, loyalty; it means to do good to others

B. Taoist concepts

Ci	Compassion; it refers to a natural and spontaneous kindness
Dao	The way of Heaven; it refers to the way of nature that keeps it balanced and in order
De	Virtue; it refers to an inherent power to empowers individuals to conform to the way in which *dao* operates
Jian	Frugality; it refers to simplicity of desires
Sanbao	Three treasures that help individuals manifest *dao*; it includes *ci* (compassion), *jian* (frugality), and *bugan wei tainsiz xian* (not dare to be ahead in the world)

Wuwei	Non-assertive action; a Taoist tenet that involves knowing when to act and when not to act
Yin / Yang	'The shady side' / 'The sunny side'; two opposite cosmic forces that complement each other in creating things
You / Wu	Being / Beingless; *you* refers to Heaven and Earth, and *wu* refers to *dao* which is nameless and formless
Ziran	Nature or naturalness; when it is used as naturalness, it refers to the ability to follow the patterns of nature