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'I think I am…'
– a qualitative study of Chinese students' identity formation process in an international branch campus in China

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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses identity and its formation of 45 Chinese undergraduate students in an international branch campus in China. The qualitative data collected in loosely-structured interviews reveal the complexity of their identity and formation process in their life trajectories in this university (TU). Giddens's idea of anticipation of identity and Archer's typology of reflexivity are employed as the two major theoretical and analytical devices in this research.

These students' interview accounts demonstrate that they explored and constructed their self/identity in the process of adaptation to TU and a social reproduction of the TU culture. Meanwhile, the TU context – the structure they are involved in – provides certain space for their agential powers (agency) to guide their decision-making and action-taking.

This research lets students speak for themselves about 'who they think they are' with minimum researcher intervention, rather than fitting them into any pre-designated identity mode/theory such as an Eriksonian stage mode. Accordingly, this research is more open to 'possibilities' emerging in my students' personal development. Additionally, this research supports and expands Archer's hypothesis of reflexivity by putting it into practice in my empirical investigation and creating particular 'agency-structure interaction cycles in individual identity formation' based on it. This research also provides a potential solution to hybridizing habitus and reflexivity in understanding the relationship between agency and structure in this era of late modernity.

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Chapter I. Introduction

This research explores identity formation in Chinese undergraduate students at an international branch campus (IBC) established in mainland China, through their own accounts of their lived experiences in this campus. This chapter falls into two parts. The first part presents a brief but critical review of the current position of IBCs as depicted by the Chinese mass media and amongst the public as well as the research interest in IBCs in China. In the second part, the key concepts and the outline of this research are introduced.

1.1 The context

Since the establishment of the first IBC in mainland China in 2003 (Ministry of Education of People’s Republic of China (MoE), 2003), the term‘*zhongwaihezuobanxue’* (中外合作办学, Sino-foreign educational cooperation in running schools or transnational higher education [TNHE]) has remained in the public attention (Beijing Morning Post, 2016; Guo, 2016; Liu, 2018) and has also drawn much attention from educational practitioners and researchers (e.g. Fang, 2011; Huang, 2003, 2007; Mok & Han, 2016; Mok & Yu, 2011; Wilkins & Huisman, 2012).

Judging from an intensive search on this topic, the Chinese public’s foremost concerns seem to be related to the personal benefits to be gained from TNHE. When searching Baidu for this term, the top search queries are whether the investment in TNHE is worthwhile for both individuals and Chinese society as a whole and whether TNHE will promise easier access to Western universities for its students’ further education. The raising of these questions suggests that

higher education (HE) is widely seen as both a product and a form of investment. It is understandable that the Chinese government 'has explicitly and repeatedly underlined the connection between education and economic development' (Turner & Acker, 2002, p.1) and parents and students consider HE as an investment to gain advantage in China's intensely competitive labour market; before paying for their 'expensive' education (TNHE), parents and students need to know what they will obtain in return.

A challenge to this perspective has been presented by, for example, Biesta (2009 cited in Zhao, 2016, p.165). He argues that under the overwhelmingly rising influence of economic globalisation, people have gradually forgotten what he sees as a more fundamental goal of HE –'person-making' (*ibid*). Historically, both 'the West' and 'the Orient' have placed considerable emphasis on the philosophical and civilising functions of education (Deresiewicz, 2014; Ke, 2016; Turner & Acker, 2002). In the 'traditional' Western education paradigm, it is argued that education, HE in particular, should serve as a facilitator for young people who are engaged in it to 'think and reflect' (Deresiewicz, 2014, p.81). While in oriental educational paradigm such as Confucianism, 'the cultivation and perfection of the self' is widely expected to be the central aim of education (Ke, 2016, p.122). But contemporary universities seem to have accepted a shift in their position to being totally a by-product of or a servicing agent for the economic system, in order to meet expectations from the public and win the competition in the education market (Daniels & Brooker, 2014). In a sense, graduates from HE have been made into cogs of the 'economic machine' by the employability-oriented curriculum and pedagogy of universities (Fromm, 1994, originally published in 1941, p.110). Given that the public focus on whether TNHE is the worthwhile 'investment', referred to the earlier discussion, it may be that TNHE graduates are particularly susceptible to such an accusation. Their images in reports of various media are commonly about success in their careers (see UNNC news about young entrepreneurs, 2018; XJTLU alumni stories and news, 2018) or about brilliant and happy young people who have experienced a productive and colourful TNHE college trajectory (Beijing Morning Post, 2016; Li, 2015; Guo,

2016; Shao & Xu, 2016; Sohu.com, 2016). Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that other voices in the mass media take the position that the current college students, of the 'post-90 generation', are spoiled, having been raised in more affluent families than older generations (Liu, 2013; Rosen, 2009). It seems that current college students may be victims of stereotyping by others from different backgrounds. It is important to question such stereotyping and in particular to seek the perspective of these college students themselves. This research is one small contribution to this task.

Although information about the nature of Chinese students' learning both at home and abroad is rich in the existing literature (e.g. Cen, 2017; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Li, 2004; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Wu, 2015), it has not provided a more holistic picture of Chinese students. Perhaps because of the newness of TNHE in China, there has been little published research on students in TNHE. Given the rather 'exclusive' nature of TNHE, these students provide an interesting sub-population in which to explore the validity or otherwise of these depictions of 'post-90 spoiled students'. It seems from the lack of research literature, that research interest in the lived experience amongst TNHE students is extremely low. Does this suggest that scholars are assuming for example that the learning journey amongst Chinese students within TNHE is similar to or the same as Chinese overseas students learning in an English-speaking country?

There have been more general studies of TNHE (e.g. Altbach, 2010; Fang, 2011; Huang, 2003; Mok & Han, 2016a, b; Stanfield, 2013), but only a handful of studies focus on the student-level experience. Among these, we have Tan et al. (2016) depicting the students as 'customers', while others focus on their levels of satisfaction (e.g. Ahmad, 2015; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013), or their employment/employability (e.g. Mok & Han, 2016a). This phenomenon is also understandable if we accept the common current portrayal of students as 'customers', who deserve to be served well by the educational producers, and their employment seems to be the apparent and straightforward return they get from the much higher educational investment involved in attending a TNHE

institution. Broader notions of students' personal development which should be a keynote of HE have long been ignored by both HE providers and receivers.

It is interesting that besides the above mentioned issues in China's TNHE and its students, there is another which has been the subject of heated discussion — the potential ideological and cultural impact on TNHE students, as TNHE is a 'foreign presence' in the educational process, which has historically been seen as important for national cultural reproduction. For some Chinese commentators such worries seem to outweigh the attainments of Chinese students within TNHE. Worries mostly come from the following twofold aspects: the fear of 'Westernisation' (e.g. Li, 2005) and cultural colonisation (e.g. Xiang, 2002); and the erosion of Chinese traditional cultural roots (e.g. Li, 2005; Shen, 2017; Song, 2017). However, other scholars claim to embrace the alleged educational 'Westernisation' for the reason that it is a form of cross-cultural cooperation and communication in Chinese HE, rather than seeing it as a threat (Wang, 2002). Moreover, a recent empirical study examining values of citizenship amongst Chinese students within a TNHE institution in China reveals that these young Chinese people in the study do in fact display a considerable awareness of their social responsibilities (Li, 2017).

It seems hard to piece the existing information on TNHE and its students together into a coherent picture. An integrated understanding of it is still waiting to be developed. My research will contribute to this in a small but significant way by examining some of the experiences and impacts of TNHE from students' perspectives, particularly in relation to their effects on aspects of their identity.

1.2 The research

It is in the context of such views and concerns that this research about Chinese students' 'growing', in terms of their identity development, has been conducted in an IBC established in China. Before outlining my research, I would like to clarify the key concepts and their interpretations appearing in this thesis, which are of vital importance for understanding my epistemological stance in this thesis.

1.2.1 The key notions

TNHE and IBC

TNHE is regarded as a form of HE programme defined by provider mobility, where students enrol without 'having to move to the country of the HE provider' (Levatino, 2017, p.638); IBCs are one type of TNHE (Fang, 2011; Wilkins & Huisman, 2012). Although the history of TNHE in modern China is not long, just dating back to the last two decades or so, TNHE activities have been increasing rapidly (Huang, 2003, 2007; Mok & Han, 2016b). All forms of TNHE, including the IBCs, in China are defined as 'Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (CFCS)' (MoE, 2003), referring to an educational institution - including an independent campus or a school in a faculty - established in mainland China in collaboration with a foreign institution (including those from Taiwan, Hong Kong or Macao) and mainly providing educational services to Chinese students. The founding rationale of CFCS was to strengthen international communication and cooperation in the field of education and promote higher education quality in China (*ibid*). To date, there are 9 IBCs and over two thousand TNHE programmes cooperating with Chinese state-universities in mainland China (MoE, 2018). My research takes place in an IBC. It is a British branch campus cooperatively run with a Chinese HE institution. This IBC is located in a coastal city in mainland China. Both Chinese students (including those from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao) and students from other countries are

enrolled in the IBC. This particular IBC will be referred to as TU (the university) in this thesis.

The Chinese students/undergraduates

The introduction of TNHE was facilitated and encouraged by China to serve Chinese students and advance Chinese HE practices (MoE, 2003). According to the official regulations, 'Chinese students' refers to all students who hold a Chinese mainland identity card (ID) no matter which ethnic group they belong to; students from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao are regarded as non-local Chinese students, who are treated according to the same regulations that apply to students from all other countries. The group of Chinese students investigated in this research happen to be all Han Chinese. They share at least one other characteristic: the so-called 'post-90 generation' amongst Chinese public, who are commonly depicted in various media as 'spoiled and pampered', 'money-worshipping' 'the second rich generation' and even 'cynics' (Cockain, 2011; Goh, 2017; Liu, 2013; Rosen, 2009). Although there are newspapers trying to reverse the negative impressions of them (Hook, 2012; Yan, 2020), the public seem to remain fixated on these widely presented stereotypes.

Identity

My research explores how the experiences in this particular education context – the TU context - impact on its students' exploration and perception of the development of their identities.

Identity is notorious for its 'slippery, blurred and confusing nature' (Wetherell, 2010, p.3), which results in a lack of consensus on its definition, entailment and construction (Schwartz & Luyckx, 2011). In this thesis, my approach to 'identity' starts through posing the 'beginning point [question]' (Wetherell, 2010, p.7) of 'Who do you think you are?' It is not just a starting point, but a statement of intent about how I wish to continue with the research through valuing (valorising) and empowering the individual's

perspective. It is an intent which potentially gives greater power to the individuals to define their own identity rather than having it assigned to them by an outsider such as myself. This is an initial implication that must be explored further, and I will do so in my Methodology Chapter.

Although 'Who are you?' is commonly asked by Eriksonian and neo-Eriksonian researchers to start their examinations of how individuals develop ego identity during their life cycle (Côté and Levine, 1987; Schachter, 2005; Wetherell, 2010), the connotations of identity in this thesis do not fully conform to such a paradigm. For Erikson (1996[1950]) and his followers (e.g. Berzonsky, 2003; Kroger & Macia, 2011; Munley, 1975; Schachter, 2005; Torres et al., 2009), constructing the ego identity as 'a self-consistent and stable identity [that] is basic to universal human nature' (Schachter, 2005, p.143). Over their life cycle, individuals will encounter and deal with various problems – the recurrent 'identity crisis' formulated by Erikson - at different stages, where they can shape their identity by completing the task of solving these problems (Berzonsky, 2003; Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Munley, 1975; Schachter, 2005; Torres et al., 2009). Accordingly, if one overcomes the 'identity crisis', then for Erikson, one has reached an equilibrium between one's 'inner sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others' (Erikson, 1965, p.253, cited in Hakola, 2009, p.8) and successfully developed an authentic identity (Côté & Levine, 1987; Wetherell, 2010; Whitfield, 2000). It seems that through this approach to identity development individual's life mission is to obtain such an 'authentic' identity.

Drawing on these assumptions, some widely adopted college student development models have been established, such as 'seven vectors' classification of identity formation by Chickering and Reisser (1993[1969]), Marcia's (1966) ego identity development model (using empirical data from male subjects only) and Josselson's ego identity development theory (now including female subjects) (1987, 1996). All these stage theorists postulate a normative path to lead college students to construct a successful or 'good'

identity by completing various missions at different stages along the path; otherwise, their identity construction will probably be damaged and incomplete or even in need of 'fixing', if they failed in these missions (Frosh, 2011).

Such a paradigm was popularised in the 20th century (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005[1991]), but in the contemporary world, the notions of sameness and continuity in identity construction are commonly questioned (Hakola, 2009; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Meijl, 2010; Wetherell, 2010). Hakola (2009) argues that the Eriksonian model is hierarchical and inflexible; it will fail to explain identity formation in diverse social contexts. He then advocates a dynamic approach to identity construction which should closely link the person's inner psychological development with changes in the social world (*ibid*). In a similar vein, Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) and Meijl (2010) also place considerable emphasis on the impact of the circumstances which individuals encounter during their identity construction, in particularly - in the contemporary world - under the impact of globalisation. They believe the 'destination' of identity formation has changed from 'sameness' into 'difference' (Meijl, 2010) or even 'uncertainty' (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007) due to globalisation, which has in return brought uncertainty to the contemporary world. Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) argue that identity investigation should transcend a single bounded domain or context; instead, they suggest examining identity within a 'global-local nexus' (p.56) and call for cooperation amongst various disciplines, such as psychiatry, sociology, history and philosophy (*ibid*). Meijl (2010) claims that Hermans and Dimaggio's (2007) proposition of an uncertain identity is short of evidence; he asserts instead that identity in the contemporary era is developed in multiple dimensions.

These authors propose a clear orientation for future study of identity formation, from a model of identity stability towards one of multiple dimensions and a relative lack of finality of fixedness. A feature and consequence of globalisation is that it is increasing individual mobility.

Hermans and Dimaggion (2007) argue that in the contemporary world, adolescents' identity may be developed in diverse ways compared with people of the older generation. Adolescents may be partly rooted in their home cultures but also influenced by exotic contexts they encounter through this mobility over their life cycle (see also Meiji, 2010). Arnett (2000, 2004) focuses specifically on college students as a sub-group of young people whose college experiences offer opportunities to experiment in various new contexts. He maintains that young people, ageing from 18 to 25, are a specific group, most of whom have not settled down in work or marriage but keep exploring and evolving themselves. He refers to college students' identity as evolving and being unpredictable because most college students are in a developmental stage, labelled 'emerging adulthood', which is characterised by development and instability because of the 'in-between' (adolescents and adults) nature of the college years. In other words, college students are not adolescents anymore but have not yet grown up to be adults. In this respect, college students will probably explore and form their 'multi-layered, multi-sourced…and at times, paradoxical [identities] in beliefs of self, position, relationships, and learning contexts within the research extensive university setting' (Kasworm, 2010, p.143). However, Nelson et al. (2004) predict that culture might play a significant role in Arnett's hypothesis of emerging adulthood; thus, the situation in China might differ from the US context in which Arnett worked. They examine the perception of adulthood amongst 207 Chinese college students, enrolled in Beijing Normal University and show that cultural elements, such as traditional Chinese values and social norms, are determinants in this stage amongst college students' personal development. Their findings illustrate that 59% of these students claimed that they had reached adulthood (Nelson et al., 2004). Although there were 35% of them held ambivalent views on whether they had become adults or not, compared with Western college students [e.g. 27% (Arnett, 1998); 36% (Arnett, 2003); 24% (Nelson, 2003) cited in Nelson et al., 2004, p.31], it seems that most Chinese college students consider themselves as adults after they go to college. But reaching adulthood to these Chinese young people does not

mean they have stopped developing themselves. Nelson et al. (2004) assume that even though Chinese college students experience a shorter period of emerging adulthood than most of their Western counterparts, university still provides them a stage for self-exploration in terms of their 'identity and belief' (p.34).

Chinese college students within IBCs constitute a particular group who are immersed in a heterogeneous cultural context with both 'exotic' Western institutional cultures and the indigenous cultures of the host country. This might be anticipated to be a situation in which multi-dimensional identities models will be appropriate. As a corollary, their identity merits a close examination from multiple dimensions, rather than a mode of 'good identity' development as in the Eric Eriksonian paradigm.

The concept of an authentic ego identity in an Erikson approach also needs questioning. Although individuals' language and behaviour can reflect their thoughts to some extent, these must always be interpreted by the researcher/observer and, unless directly recording thoughts by 'setting a camera in the other's mind', it is difficult for us to guarantee to capture an authentic self/ego through observing expressions and behaviours in any empirical research in the field of social science. Even in a covert ethnography, what observers can see may not be a full reflection of the authentic self but simply individuals' responses to their present settings or performances interpreted by the observers. What we can peep at through an Eriksonian approach may be 'the information … one would want known by others' (Goffman, 1963, cited in Lernert, 2011, p.19), rather than an 'authentic' ego. Identity is not a research object which can be independently separated from people's perceptions and experiences. In this sense, an interpretive research approach seems appropriate in identity study (see Sandburg's characterisation of positivist and interpretive approaches, cited in Weber, 2004, p.vi).

In order to examine and address who my research participants think they are, rather than looking for the answer to the question of 'Who are you?' as most Eriksonian researchers have done, I let this group of Chinese students talk about their self-perceptions of their own identity formation in this particular learning context. Identity reflected by these answers will not be categorised as ego/self or social identity for reasons given in the previous paragraphs. Rather, what I am interested in is things dominant to these Chinese students' personal growth. Moreover, it seems impossible to disentangle the ego and social identity in practice. Our identity starts to be shaped from birth and keeps developing over our lifespan. Every decision we have made to influence our life is a sign of our reflexivity as agents; it also seems to be a response we constructed under the influences of structural forces. Our identity is formed in this always on-going integration of agency and structure (Adams, 2006; Sweetman, 2003). Reflexivity, on the one hand, opens up possibilities for people to make decisions that affect their life by consciously drawing on their learnt competences and all forms of accumulated relationships within and in relation to the surroundings; it, on the other hand, can make people aware of the limitations to what they can change and how they can act in the context of the long pre-existing cultures and norms derived from their age, gender, class, sexuality, sense of prejudice, discrimination and marginalisation (Adams, 2006; Giddens, 1991; Sweetman, 2003). In such conditions, the self or identity is comprised of a sense and understanding of ourselves and the social relationships and interactions in the world in which we are living (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). Even sometimes, people may find it difficult to tell whether their image in the mirror is one's true self or the 'desire' of others (Lacan, 1949, cited in Frosh, 2011, p.60).

In this research, a sociological form of identity will be drawn on. From a sociological perspective, the existence of the ego-identity is not denied but is problematised as one part of the agency-structure dualism and dilemma. Identity in this research is studied through students' self-perception and understandings of their becoming, and their own exploration of their identity

formation in different contexts in this particular education environment, which together constitute the 'structures' part of the agency-structure duality. It is notable that although students in this IBC will finally become 'old timers' from 'newcomers' (Wenger, 1999) as time passes, the process of their identity formation will not be as uniform as the process of ageing. Ageing will make freshmen become senior students, for example, and equip students with some shared features attained and nurtured during their college years; while their individually-specific identity formation will differentiate them from others.

Such a perspective of identity formation corresponds with the key positions proposed in some theories which stress the significance of context in the formation of identity, such as the Ecology of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1996) and the Conceptual Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity Development (Jones & McEwen, 2000). These theories are devoted to establishing a multiple identity development model; nevertheless, they seem to underestimate complexity and flexibility of identity formation. Although Bronfenbrenner (*op. cit.*) formulates a five-layer concentric ring model to illuminate the relationships between different levels of contexts with the developing person, such a description still seems inadequate to display and explain the changing and unpredictable global situations in the contemporary world. Jones and McEwen (2000) develop their model in an American higher educational context. There are no pre-categorised levels of context as there are in Bronfenbrenner's model; but they focus instead on six dimensions of identity - gender, race, culture, class, religion and sexual orientation - which they believe are the most significant, although their evidence for this seems to be simply based on a count of the frequency with which they appear in the literature, without providing assertive evidence. It is notable that the most frequently researched identity dimensions are not merely such six. One identity handbook edited by Schwartz et al. (2011), for example, introduces identity studies in multifaceted forms, such as relational identity, role identity, national identity and material identity. Furthermore, since Jones and McEwen (2000) place emphasis on the impact

of the change of settings on identity formation, their contextual model has to be questioned as to whether the same or similar situation will occur when the research context changes, for example in a TNHE institution in mainland China.

In this research identity will not to be pre-categorised into such groups. Instead, the themes of identities in this research all emerge from the study participants' accounts in interviews and our other conversations. Without postulating preconceived boundaries, I have recorded rich information from them which can facilitate the capture of a relatively holistic portrait of their growth in this TNHE context.

It is worth noticing that studies of identity can focus on a wide range of 'forms' of identities, such as personal identity, social identity, political and ethnic identities (Wetherell, 2010). I acknowledge that in a general sense their identity formation will be influenced by multiple factors such as their ethnicity as Han Chinese and their gendered identity, but this research focuses essentially on one aspect of my respondents' identities: their identity as students. It aims to investigate the students' own perceptions of what is happening to their identities in TU and how they themselves help to form their identity.

1.2.2 About this research

I personally took interest in conducting this research for two reasons. One is due to my own academic experiences in one TNHE institution and my encounters with identity dilemmas in this cross-cultural context. I feel the campus I am involved in is neither a British nor a Chinese university. I became curious about what influences it will exert on students, including myself, and who these students will become as a result. Also, I was stimulated by Kim's study (2014) (see section 2.4) which examined the phenomenon at multiple levels that included individual student development in one IBC in South Korea. Although Kim adopted a different theoretical

approach in using Bhabha's 'third space', her research reveals an interesting phenomenon that 'traditional [Korean] students' (p.9) alienated those studying in that IBC and regarded them as 'international students' (p.235), although they shared the same Korean ethnicity. Kim finds that one main reason for this is that 'English fluency' is commonly seen by traditional students as a mark of being international students (2014, p.209). Those Korean students studying in that IBC 'carry the burden of shame and guilt over with their fluent English' (*ibid*) and deliberately hide their role as students of that TNHEI. I was eager to know what would happen to Chinese students in a similar context.

This research began with my perception that the views of TNHE and its students from Chinese mass media and public are often too sweeping and misleading, and the research ranges of scholars in the field of TNHE and education are often too general, as I discussed earlier. In response to this 'outsider' view of students within TNHE, my work lets the students – the 'insiders' – utter their own words to reveal their own lived experiences and growth from their own viewpoints and to break the dominant representational views of them from the 'outsiders'. Taking one IBC as a case, the research aims to intimately portray college life of a small group of Chinese students enrolled in this very particular higher education environment in China and to illustrate their personal growth and changes from their perspective. Their 'uniqueness' uncovers some characteristics of Chinese youth making up this interesting group in this educational environment and introduces China's TNHE to the public from a student's viewpoint. Nevertheless, I do not aim for generalisable results, but rather for celebration of diversity (I justify why it is not possible to generalise college students' identity formation in Methodology Chapter.)

Research questions

I ask two research questions for conducting this research: 1) What do these Chinese undergraduate students perceive their identities in this university (TU) to be? 2) How do they form their identity at TU?

In order to answer these questions, I employed a qualitative research approach for the following three reasons. Firstly, a qualitative paradigm suits the need of '[looking] for patterns of interrelationship between many categories' (McCracken, 1988, p.16). Students, when entering a new educational system, will encounter many previously unknown situations and they are challenged to reconstruct their behaviour and attitudes to readjust to the features and demands of the new environment, which are related to their identities formation. Moreover, this transitional process to become an 'insider' of TU will occur in complex conditions influenced by multiple individual characteristics such as personality, preferences and pre-college habits. Qualitative methods can capture these nuances and details that ultimately distinguish one 'identity' from another. Secondly, my research aims not to subsume individual diversity even though analysis into 'categories' may be inevitable, as a rejection of over-stereotyping of Chinese students. It is qualitative methods that will provide various possibilities rather than quantitative methods whose analysis is fixed by statistics and in which analytical categories must be pre-identified for constructing data collection instruments.

Furthermore, this research is small scale and is not engaged with the aim of producing widely generalisable results – except to the extent that they tell us something about the processes of identity development – but rather to identify a group of young Chinese people who are challenging the stereotypes imposed by others and growing energetically and hopefully in a particular learning context. Rich information from interviews in this research also implies how these young Chinese respond to changes in the world outside the campus. Lastly, only a qualitative paradigm can provide the

room for me, the researcher to play my 'liminal' role (as articulated by Victor Turner, 1969) as both insider and outsider of this IBC. My liminality of 'outsider-becoming insider' is shared with my research participants and therefore provides an important part of 'contact' with them, which may sensitise me to understand them effectively. I have experienced a position as a new comer from outside and have engaged with (and continue to engage with) the process of outsider-to-insider transformation, which makes me qualified to testify to the process of identity formation in this group of Chinese students, as well as changes in myself. Through participating in students' activities, I collected ethnographic data and became involved in this particular environment and could deeply comprehend the barriers in the way of understanding this group of Chinese youth and their strong desire to be heard. Given consideration of these positions, a qualitative paradigm is most suitable for realising the purpose of this research.

1.2.3 Significance of this research

This research makes several important contributions to educational research and practice. It will enlarge the research literature on TNHE in China at the student level, make some methodological contribution to patterns of investigation into college students identity formation. Theoretically, it puts Archer's typology of reflexivity into practice and provides a possibility of hybridising and integrating what may seem to be irrelevant and even contradictory concepts and theories (habitus and reflexivity; structure and agency) in this thesis to depict and elaborate on individual identity formation. Furthermore, this study can serve as a reminder for TNHE practitioners of what their students really desire from their years in TNHE. By giving voice to the students themselves on matters fundamental to their present and future lives, but beyond more frequent concerns with a narrowly academic or vocational nature, it is anticipated that the study will not only produce original knowledge of a theoretical nature, but will also be of practical value to all stakeholders in TNHE. Insofar as learning is necessarily

something which takes place at the individual level, an understanding of the diversity of individual experiences gives this study implications for curriculum design and teaching practice in such a cross-cultural learning and teaching environment. As noted by the study participants themselves, high quality of academic knowledge and rich practical skills are what they desired and anticipated before coming to TU. Moreover, it seemed that what they experienced at TU generated a feeling of 'self-difference' or personal individuality which to some extent hinders their involvement in the domestic context, although they felt they had little difficulty in participating in Western contexts. My research has also found that cross-cultural communication in this particular education environment was not as effective as expected: not only communication between Chinese students and their international peers, but also misunderstandings and barriers between students and teachers, both home and overseas.

This research also gives some insights into contemporary Chinese educated youth as well as the changes in Chinese society. These 'post-90' students, who are 'spoiled' in the eyes of many of the older generations, perceive life and sense the world differently and diversely. The differentiation results from changes in the whole society and also makes the 'uniqueness' of who they are.

The research works as a prism for IBC outsiders; by peeping through this particular IBC, they will better explore and comprehend 'the truth' of IBCs in China and its students from the perspective of those students, and also serves as a reminder for IBC (also other educational forms of TNHE) practitioners to pay close attention to students' growth in this particular learning context, instead of accepting preconceived and widely distributed stereotypes. It also provides a space for students within IBCs to utter their own words and to reflect their vivid and unique characteristics to others. Lastly, the researcher herself has experienced her personal growth, which is meaningful for her. Through talking with the students, the researcher has learned to respect and understand diversities.

Chapter II Literature Review

In the Introduction, I explained and justified my choice of the concept of identity adopted in this research. This concept is of identity as comprising a sense and understanding of ourselves and the social relationships and interactions in the world in which we are living (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). Interactions between the self and the context in which one is located constitute the core of the *identity formation* process. The first part of this chapter will continue to justify this interactive relationship as the core of identity development, specialising in the HE domain. Some modes and theories that help to shed light on college student identity formation will be critically reviewed firstly, followed by a discussion of my attempt to integrate agency/structure dichotomy in college student identity research. Then, I explicate how these readings inspire me to decide on theoretical guidelines for my thesis. The remaining parts of this chapter provide reviews on 1) 'Chinese students' experiences and dispositions in learning' in the existing research literature, in both domestic and overseas learning contexts; 2) three particular studies on Chinese students' individual development; and 3) an investigation of an IBC at student level.

2.1 College student identity formation modes/theories

Two camps of modes/theories inspiring the study of college student identity formation will be reviewed in this section, the agency-dominant camp and the structure-dominant camp. Theorists taking stances of agency determination in identity formation can be further divided into two categories, psychological developmentalists (e.g. Marcia's ego identity development mode, 1966; Chickering's seven vectors, 1969; Josselson's theory of identity development in women, 1987, 1996) and cognitive-structuralists (e.g. Baxter Magolda's epistemological mode, 2005, 2014; Perry's scheme of intellectual and ethnical development, 1968). The structure-dominant camp centres on how the external university settings

impose structural forces on students' personal development (e.g. Feldman and Newcomb's college impact theory, 1994).

2.1.1 Agency-determinant modes/theories

Psychological development modes/theories

Psychological development modes deeply endorse an Eriksonian approach to identity (see 'Eriksonian approach' in Introduction). Since these modes are rooted in the foundation of Erikson's ego identity theory, they intend to depict student development to be a transitional process from 'differentiation' to 'integration' (Pascarella & Terenzini [P&T], 2005, p.19). Additionally, Erikson (1996[1950]) claimed that an individual's identity development is the process of completing tasks and overcoming crises in different stages. Psychological theorists accordingly depict college student identity development process as belonging to various stages. Similar to seeking individuals' 'authentic identity' in the Eriksonian paradigm, psychological theorists aim to look for 'correct' processes which can lead students to construct a successful or 'good' identity by completing various missions at different stages along the path in university; otherwise, their identity construction may be damaged and incomplete or even in need of 'fixing', if college students fail in these missions (Frosh, 2011).

Taking Marcia's ego identity development mode as an example, we can see that Marcia's (1966) asserts identity development would occur when individuals can complete their personal development tasks in four different stages, namely, identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium and identity achievement. According to whether students can resolve their identity crises and make commitments to their 'occupational, religious, political and sexual values' (P&T, 2005, p.24) through their own identity exploration, they will be categorised into one of those four statuses. The stage of identity achievement is an ideal status and the 'end' of their development process in university, while students in the other three statuses will need 'psychoanalytical intervention' (*ibid*) to reach the ideal

status. In order to reach the ideal stage, however, individuals do not necessarily go through all the other three stages; rather, they can readjust themselves in any of the other three stages and arrive at the identity achievement stage when they have realised and settled their 'identity crises'. Whatever perspectives psychological theorists put identity study into, they have a consensus on one criterion – individuals' completion of their tasks in different stages - to measure the 'quality' of individuals' identity development (Rodgers, 1989, cited in P&T, 2005, p.20). Moreover, conventionally, psychological theorists tend to use participants' own 'external' expressions and the researchers' 'external' observations and interpretations to explain and analyse the participants' 'internal' self/ego identity. It is doubtful whether using this way to examine 'ego identity' is methodologically reliable because identity is mostly 'a struggle for information control' between the facts and the social 'stigma' (Lernert, 2011, pp.18-19). It is also doubtful how much we could trust that the verbal expressions and actions observed by others can display one's ego identity to others, although language and behaviour can (re)present one's inner mind in domains such as attitudes, emotions and values. Those expressions and actions may sometimes refer to what a person wants 'others' to know consciously or unconsciously. Or they may be merely a choice the person has made in a certain context, but not an indication of his/her holistic self. An individual's self-presentation may not wholly tell us who the person is. Instead, it may be more of a reflection of his/her own dispositions to the settings. This phenomenon is easy to understand in our daily life but may be ignored in research. Actually, in research, the presentation of the self occurs in particular forms of interaction with the 'researcher-other'; furthermore, the observation made or data obtained still has to be interpreted by the 'researcher-other'. I do not deny the contribution made by psychological approaches enlightening and facilitating the study of a person's identity development, but there are limits to the understanding of identity formation obtainable through such approaches.

Cognitive-structural modes/theories

Different from psychological theorists whose concentration is on the content of identity, such as 'vectors', and 'identity statuses' of individuals' development (P&T, 2005, p.33), cognitive-structuralists are concerned with the individuals' 'epistemological structures' (*ibid*), for example in the process of being and becoming at university. Nevertheless, rather than being in opposition, these two categories of models are complementary. '[Psychological models describe] what students will be concerned about and what decisions for them will be primary; [cognitive-structural models suggest] how students will think about those issues and what shifts in reasoning will occur' (Knefelkamp et al., 1978, cited in P&T, 2005, p.33). In other words, both the categories picture the process of an individual's identity development but from two different perspectives that are not mutually exclusive. They are also both built on a subjective social ontology - the objective world subject to and serving individuals' agency.

One distinctive characteristic of cognitive-structural theories is that they strongly reject a direct role for the objective world in the process of identity formation (Evans et al., 1998; P&T, 2005). Taking a further thesis in the cognitive-structural category - theory of self-authorship (see Baxter Magolda, 2014; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005) – as an example, we can see this approach largely emphasises the power of self-authority and the subjective use and mastery of external influences, including cultural contexts, in identity formation and the construction of social connections in the individual's entire life (*ibid*).

Kegan (1994) firstly introduced and depicted 'self-authorship' as

> an ideology, an internal identity, as *self-authorship* that can coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalties, and intrapersonal states. It is no longer *authored* by them, it *authors them* and thereby achieves a personal authority (p. 185, italics in original, cited in Cen, 2017, p.16).

This position in the theory of self-authorship may derive from the origins of this theory in a North American college context. This renders it closely related to features of North American ideologies and culture, particularly individualism and self-reliance, which demand that identity development should be independent from the context in which it takes place. This of course itself involves a contradiction at the heart of self-authorship since it is a model which is influenced – even determined – by the context in which it was developed.

The application of a self-authorship approach in a Chinese context (even in the complex cultural context of a collaborative HE institution like TU), however, has not been fully examined. Nevertheless, one empirical study carried out in Chinese universities (Cen, 2017) does adopt it as its theoretical framework. The study's author, Cen, has realised the potential problem in the implication of this theory. She reminds us that even if self-authorship has been accepted as a powerful concept in the study of students' growth in American HE, it might not work as an appropriate instrument in Chinese HE, given the contrasts in ideologies, cultures and values between the two countries (*ibid*). Cen claims that, for example, Americans tend to emphasise individualism and self-centredness, while Chinese admire collectivist cultures and strive for harmony among different groups of people (*ibid*). In this respect, at the beginning of her book Cen (2017) advocates a modification to the self-authorship approach to fit into a Chinese context, although her research draws significantly on Baxter Magolda's model. She seems not to mention this advocacy in the later discussion in her book, however, nor to enlighten us on an approach to integrating self-authorship with the Chinese HE context. She only concludes that Chinese students learning depends on their active engagement in both curricular and extracurricular activities. Their own endeavours and willingness in learning constitute the engagement, but students' achievements have nothing to do with the university conditions. Thus, Cen asserts that Chinese college students' self-authorship determinates their own level of development and

quality of learning experiences in universities. This seems to be little different from their American counterparts, in Cen's conclusion. She suggests that students and parents should not pay too much attention to the competition for entering a top-ranked university, such as 985 or 211 project universities, because it is not the conditions of universities but students' own 'quality of effort' that plays a decisive role in their learning (Cen, 2017, p.136) (also see detailed review of Cen's study in section 2.3).

Cen's findings may not be generalisable to all Chinese college students' learning outcomes because she purposefully focused on subjects who met her pre-designated standard of 'learning outcomes' – outcomes in academic and non-academic domains obtained inside or outside the classroom. Her findings may be applicable to those whose engagement in university is active and autonomous, but she ignores various qualities of student engagement. For those who cannot reach the level of engagement she demands, learning outcomes may be widely influenced by the university context and other external conditions. It is not my intention, however, to disagree with the view that 'internal power' (agency) is highly significant - and sometimes perhaps determinative - in individual development, so much as to suggest that the influence of structures should not be dismissed; learning is more of a social process than an isolated activity (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and the sense of absolute independence from the external influences may be a delusion. As German psychologist Fromm reminds us,

> …We neglect the role of the anonymous authorities like public opinion and 'common sense', which are so powerful because of our profound readiness to conform to the expectations everybody has about ourselves and our equally profound fear of being different. (Fromm, 1994[1941], p.105)

2.1.2 Structure-determinant modes/theories

Feldman and Newcomb (1994 [initially published in 1967]), Kaufman and Feldman (2004) and P& T (2005) argue that large majority of investigations into college student identity formation are from psychological and cognitive-

structural perspectives approaches, but only a few from a sociological perspective. The psychological and cognitive-structural approaches focus on investigating students' internal worlds, but they make influences on students' development from university environment and other external settings, such as students' precollege backgrounds and the university's admission conditions, secondary or even ignore them (Feldman & Newcomb (1994[1967]); Kaufman & Feldman, 2004). Specifically, different 'precollege backgrounds', such as students' family background and previous learning habits will lead to development variations; while the conditions for admission to universities – for example, the cut-off *Gaokao* score in China – serve as a gatekeeper to guarantee only those students who match the designated condition can be enrolled. In this respect, these researchers advocate a sociological approach to student identity formation. This tendency may lead such modes of approach and theories to the other extreme of ignoring the power of human agency.

The number of modes/theories in this camp with long-lasting implications in the contemporary research area seems to be limited. Feldman and Newcomb's (1994 [1967]) assumption of a 'college impact mode' is one of them. Feldman and Newcomb raise a proposal for their 'college impact mode' by comprehensively reviewing major student development modes/ theories in the American academic literature. They point out that colleges impact on students in multiple aspects such as attitudes, values and occupational aspirations. Drawing on this mode, Kaufman and Feldman investigated 82 college students' self-perceived/felt identity formation in terms of three domains, 'intelligence and knowledgeability, occupation, and cosmopolitism' (p.463); they maintain that these three domains are those which students, parents and the society mostly expect students to develop at college. Through analysing and synthesising in-depth interview data from these college students, they find that in the social interactions and influences taking place in the college environment, (1) college helps students to develop 'a sense of intelligence and knowledgeability' (p.470) because they report they feel 'educated', think critically and talk in a 'smart' way; (2)

college environment entitles students to autonomously aspire to certain jobs with relatively high social status, for example, 'doctor' (p.477), or working in areas such as 'marketing, advertising or law' (p.478); (3) college influences students to be open to diversity. Although Kaufman and Feldman's subjects developed their self-perceived/felt identity in terms of these three most-expected domains, this does not mean such development is an inevitable phenomenon amongst all college students. Similar to Cen (2017), they also ignore variations in students' personal development. Moreover, they fail to discuss how such development is actually achieved; as if college students will accomplish such development simply by spending time in university. More directly, they appear to ignore any role for students' active personal agency.

After reviewing two major camps of college student identity formation modes/theories, it is clear that many existing modes/theories tend to lead relevant research to two opposite directions, either agency or structure dominant. Nevertheless, there are some modes/theories attempting to negotiate between these two extremes.

2.1.3 Looking for an approach between two extremes

References to issues of agency and structure permeate many studies of student growth and development in college from different perspectives (see Cen, 2017; Kaufman & Feldman, 2004; Li, 2013; Zhu, 2016). 'Agency' is broadly seen as an individual's capacity bringing about change, while 'structure' refers to the external setting within which the change is occurring. The dichotomy of agency and structure, existing as force and counterforce, is closely connected to the process and experience of individuals' identity formation. It is my position that any approach ignoring one and over-emphasising the other cannot holistically explain social relations. In this respect, seeking for an integrated approach to interpreting the relation between agency/structure and identity formation is necessary. Some

identity theories attempting to do so will be critically reviewed in this sub-section.

Identity, role, agent and group

Conventionally, answers to the question 'who am I?' are separately theorised in psychological and sociological camps primarily as self- or social identity. Côté and Charles (2002) argue that this separation derives from the on-going wider debates on agency/structure. They find that the reintroduction of the role of the person in the relationship between agency and structure questions this convention, because even in contexts of severe structural constraints individuals are 'capable of "agentic" or intentional behaviours' (*ibid*, p.9). Understanding the relationship between agency/structure and self-/social identity using an absolute separative approach is outdated and unfeasible, according to the two authors. Instead, they propose integration is the solution. Consistent with Côté and Charles' idea, Burke and Stets (2009) answer the question 'who am I' also by using an 'integrated' approach. In their approach to identity, they do not emphatically distinguish types of identity as personal or social categories; instead, they advocate the necessity of integration of the two categories in identity studies because they maintain that only in this approach can 'self' or identity be examined and understood better.

Burke and Stets (*ibid*) 're-introduce' three concepts - role, group and person - as 'three bases' of identity (p.112). They are disentangled from each other in the process of analysing identity formation, while *role* takes the central position amongst the three. Burke and Stets (2009) justify the connection between identity and the three bases in everyday settings. They argue that the process by which individuals are categorised or self-categorised in various roles and fulfil the roles they are playing is an identity formation process. The two authors maintain that each role carries expectations or meanings from social structures. In order to fulfil the role, a person needs to undertake specific behaviour. One will play various roles at the same time;

for example, a teacher who is a father to his son or a student who is an elder sister to her sisters. Thus, one will have multiple role identities at the same time. Burke and Stets (2009) then shed light on how various roles/identities interact in one person. Firstly, they identify individuals/persons as agents who are holding these multiple roles in society. They think it is the various acts of agency that the person/agent engages in that link these roles/identities. Various agencies may diverge from each other and cause 'role conflict' (*ibid*, p. 7), for example, a student, doing a part-time job may retard his/her own academic work. They may also, however, enrich and empower the agent/person. The wage and experiences gained from the part-time work may help that student's academic and daily lives.

Meanwhile, Burke and Stets (2000, 2009) assert that a person's role(s) forms his/her social identity. Because roles are defined and reproduced in a society, group, organisation or some relationships, a role must be relative to other roles taken by other people; otherwise, the role will not exist. For example, if a person is taking a role as a teacher, there must be some people who hold roles as students. In this respect, they conclude that the three bases - role, person and group – cannot be entirely disentangle in identity formation.

Being individual or social?

As discussed in the previous chapter, the key to examining identity is to negotiate the interactions between the dichotomy of agency and structure (Côté & Charles, 2002), while another central dichotomy, 'habitus and reflexivity' in individuals' negotiating processes needs discussing in identity study.

- <u>Habitus, a tool for breaking up the agency/structure dichotomy</u>

Habitus together with field and other concepts such as capital and practice constitutes the 'thinking tools' (Yang, 2014, p.1523) Bourdieu created and used to explore his theory of the process of social reproduction (Zhu, 2004;

Yang, 2014). Habitus and field as a pair are central to Bourdieu's sociological approach, but the definitions of the two concepts are never clear (Maton, 2014). 'Field' in Bourdieu's work refers to a social space subject to particular social forces or social structures (Thomson, 2014). 'Habitus' is comprised of a constellation of personal dispositions structured/structuring in the field to match its requirements (Maton, 2014, p.50). Habitus is understood as the structured way(s) in which individuals react to various social structures they are involved in and can guide individuals' behaviours both through explicit 'rules' and less conscious expectations (Thomson, 2014; Yang, 2014). Also, it is structuring and understood as the way of how individuals identify themselves in the social world and 'is usually seen as a stand-in for the individual or subjective consciousness' (Lizardo, 2004, p.381).

Bourdieu's theory often incurs accusations of social determinism (Inglis, 2013; Peters, 2014; Yang, 2014) and over-emphasis on the influence of social forces acting on people (e.g. Fuchs, 2003; King, 2000). However, some authors suggest that the criticism may derive from misinterpretation or misuse of Bourdieu's original connotations. Maton (2014) maintains that Bourdieu himself attempted to 'transcend' a series of dichotomies, such as structure/agency, outsider/insider and social/individual in creating the concept *habitus* (p.53). Bourdieu stated, 'habitus is "a socialized subjectivity" and "the social embodied"' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992a, pp.127-128, cited in Maton, 2014, p.52). Thus, in Bourdieu's work, the process of self-formation is both individual and social. In other words, although every individual could be different and choose who they want to be depending on their own agency, this differentiation between individuals must conform to certain social structures such as class, gender, and nationality. Individuals constitute social 'configurations' (Maton, 2014, p.52) and their inner improvisation is confined by the requirements of the outsider of social structure (*ibid*).

Yang (2014) articulates her defence of Bourdieu's theory and makes her point in an innovative interpretation of the relationship between habitus and

field. She (2014) argues that although Bourdieu employed 'reflexivity' in his later writings (e.g. Bourdieu, 2004), the weakness in his intention failed to generate a sufficient confidence in his readers to counter the criticism effectively of him as 'a pessimistic determinist' (Yang, 2014, p.1531). She argues, however, if 'a mismatch' of habitus and field can be located, Bourdieu's framework of social reproduction will motivate 'change' and 'consciousness' amongst individuals (p.1522). Yang elaborates that the 'mismatch' will occur when an individual without the appropriate habitus enters a new field, an event which Bourdieu calls an 'interrupted trajectory' (Bourdieu, 1996, p.184), by, for example, transcending his/her original social stratification. In this situation, the agent will (re-)produce a new habitus to match the current new field; during the transitional process to this field, the influence of his/her previous habitus will still exist; thus, a conscious change will be triggered as the two habituses become conscious 'conductors' (Yang, 2014, p.1525) in the individual. The individual's current behaviour will be guided by the new habitus and a new sense of self will be developed in the transition. When he/she comes into another new field in the future, this transition and change will develop again to produce another new habitus required by his/her new future field. In the mismatch of habitus and field, Yang (2014) believes the loop of determinism can be cut. In this respect, Yang (2014) hypothesises that there is interaction between habitus and field; it will trigger individuals to explore their positions in the social field and their self, and also link the individual's past, present and future (p.1532).

Consistent with Yang's defence of Bourdieu's theory, Reay (2010) also doubts the verdict of the 'explicit' determinism on Bourdieu's framework (p. 284). She depicts the interrelationship between habitus and field as 'dynamic' (*ibid*) by quoting Bourdieu's own words (in Wacquant, 1989, p.44), as follows.

> The relation between habitus and field operates in two ways. On one side, it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus, which is the

> product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of the field (or a hierarchy of intersecting fields). On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction: habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense or value, in which it is worth investing one's energy (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p.44).

Reay (2010) argues that individuals' identity will be (re)formed under the influence of habitus required by a certain field in which he/she is located. The process of identity formation will, in turn, exert influence on the reconstruction of the field. She (2010) provides her empirical data about pupils' identity formation in a multi-ethnic primary classroom with mainly working-class students to illustrate this dynamic interrelationship. The experience of one 'white middle-class girl' pseudonymously named Melanie, in particular (p.286), provides solid evidence of this dynamic framework. Reay's findings reveal Melanie's 'identity dilemma' (p.290) as a middle-class child inside a field of working-class peers. She was aware of her specific position in the classroom, but she excluded herself from the scorned group of 'posh children' (p.288). The process was complex, but Melanie's habitus was accepted in this field. She was recognised as a 'good' student in her classroom. While her peers treated other middle-class girls, whose classroom performance was also good, in an opposite way; they were marginalised in the peer field. Perhaps, the other girls subconsciously excluded themselves from the remaining working-class peers because they were explicitly aware that their families were better-off than many of the others (see their conversation in the research interview on p.290). Melanie's example vividly reflects Yang's (2014) hypothesis of a mismatch of habitus and field bringing about change. This mismatch awoke Melanie's consciousness of self-exploration and a readaptation to this working-class peer field. In the meantime, the peer field was simultaneously influenced because of adding a middle-class member.

Yang's (2014) argument and Reay's vivid empirical data resonate with Burke and Stets' (2009) attempt to integrate dichotomies, such as,

agency/structure and individual/social, in studying identity formations in the sociological research field. Actually, Bourdieu's concept of habitus can also be employed to ground identity study, although it is not a general theory of identity (Holmes, 2011; Sassatelli, 2011). Reay (2010) remarks that identity in Bourdieu's framework is 'being different' because Bourdieu approves of retaining 'personal styles' in the group or society people are located in. However, Reay (2010) seems to forget to mention a designated prerequisite by Bourdieu for being different, i.e., belonging to a certain group/society. Bourdieu depicts personal difference as 'never more than a deviation in relation to the style of a period or class' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.86). To some extent, Bourdieu's specification of habitus seems to constrain the implications of this approach to identity study within specific fields such as social status (Srinivas, 2013), class (Reay, 2010; Wills et al., 2011), or ethnicity (Franceschelli & O'Brien, 2015). For example, in Reay's (2010) research, although Melanie is different from other girls in her own initial class (middle-class), she is learning to behave like the predominant population of working-class peers to avoid being marginalised by them. The degree of being different in her own personal style closely depends on the requirements of the field she aspires to join, and Reay (2010) still focuses on these students' identity development in terms of social stratification. In this respect, Bourdieu's emphasis continues with the 'embodiment' of social structures (Sassatelli, 2011, p.244), and habitus is his useful tool to explain how individuals make their way through the world and construct themselves in certain structures (*ibid*).

- <u>Reflexivity</u>

The proposal that the concept of 'reflexivity' provides insights into the relationship between the individual and modern society, or between personal agency and structural influences is closely connected with two influential British theorists, Anthony Giddens (1984, 1991) and Margaret Archer (2010 [originally published in 1982], 2003, 2007a, b). They both assert that 'late modernity' can provide people with sufficient space that is conducive to realising their powers of agency, and individuals can design

their own lives, being freed – at least to some extent - from conventional social bonds (*ibid*). A phenomenon may vindicate their optimistic assumptions about life in late modernity. For example, Sweetman (2003) notices a change in the patterns of consumption from 'socialised to privatized' options for individual consumers (*ibid,* p.165). He claims that diversity in consumption indicates that individuals also have more options to decide what kind of life they want to live and who they want to be (*ibid*). Since the choice can be made entirely by individuals themselves, traditions seem to have lost their previous sovereign impact on identity formation (Chaffee, 2011).

- Giddens's notion of self-identity

Giddens tries to negotiate the agency/structure and individual/social dichotomies by re-introducing reflexivity as both an individual practice and a powerful analytical concept in late modernity (Falkheimer, 2007). Differing from Bourdieu, Giddens endows individuals' reflexivity with powerful roles in developing the self and reconstructing society (Vandemark, 2007). He criticises 'habitus' as being an objective perspective in understanding social relationships and individuals, because from this perspective, structural forces are always central and play a predominant role in various social relationships by guiding – or even 'enforcing' - individuals' behaviours. Instead, he emphasises the role of individuals' reflexivity in contemporary society in relation to identity formation (Giddens, 1991). Giddens's position may be over optimistic; he maintains that in late modernity, people have reflexive capacity and practical knowledge to understand the world, and are capable of making their own decisions and taking actions according to their own understanding. With their reflexive knowledge, people are motivated to act, and their actions are rational, in the sense that they are based on consideration and evaluation of available evidence. Additionally, their reflexivity plays an active role, enabling agents to monitor their actions and the (re)construction of the society in which they are located (van Rooyen, 2013).

Giddens claims that each individual is constantly learning to become 'a competent agent' to 'join with others on an equal basis in the production and reproduction of social relations' (1991, p.56), because their individual knowledge is 'incomplete' (*ibid*, p.101). In this respect, encountering the unacknowledged is common in their actions, and Giddens claims that social structure constitutes the unacknowledged. However, different from earlier social theorists such as Durkheim, Giddens discards the conventional definition of structure as an 'external' and 'coercive' social force (Ritzer, 2012, p.524). He describes structure as 'the structuring properties' (Giddens, 1984, p.17, cited in van Rooyen, 2013, p.497) – the resources available to agents to undertake actions and reproduce social relations. Structures in Giddens's approach are 'both constraining and enabling' (*ibid*, p.498). On the one hand, Giddens admits the designated constraints of social structure; on the other hand, he endows individuals' agency with 'self-consciousness' (Giddens & Pierson, 1998, p.76). Although Giddens argues that agency and structure constitute a mutual inter-relationship, his intention is to free agents from the necessity of accepting structural constraints (King, 2010). He puts it this way:

> The self is seen as a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible. We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves. (1991, p.75).

Giddens claims that individuals' identity formation resembles people writing their own 'autobiography' (1991, p.6). 'The past' constitutes a major part of one's autobiography because those are significant events and specific moments in one's life trajectory that characterise and explain who one is. Similarly, the past is of great significance in one's identity development (*ibid*). Giddens further describes one's life trajectory as a cohesive feature. Thus, one's past can not only form one's present, but also 'anticipate' one's future (*ibid*, p.75). This 'anticipation' can be understood as being enabled by individuals' reflexivity, which is intended to lead them to the trajectory they are longing for. But this continuity does not indicate that identity should be understood as a fixed entity. Instead, it is an on-going *process* in which

individuals integrate their agency and the external structures. As discussed in the previous chapter, the study of identity in the 21st century is far from seeking 'an essence' or certain determinants. Rather, it is recognised that identity development is fluid and multi-faceted in multiple dimensions (see Hermans and Dimaggion, 2007; Meiji, 2010).

- Archer's notion of morphogenesis

Morphogenesis is first introduced by Buckley[1], referring to 'processes which tend to elaborate or change a system's given form, structure or state' (1967, p. 58, cited by Archer, 1995, p.75). Archer borrows this term to elaborate her advocacy of an integrated perspective to negotiate the agency and structure dichotomy in understanding the process of self-formation (King, 2010). She names her approach a 'morphogenetic approach', in which 'morpho' refers to 'an acknowledgement that society has no pre-set form or preferred state' and 'genetic' implies 'a recognition that [society] takes its shape from, and is formed by, agents, originating from the intended and unintended consequences of their activities.' (Archer, 1995, p.5).

Archer claims her morphogenetic approach is different from Giddens's structuration and fiercely criticised Giddens's notion of structuration (Archer, 2010[1982]). The key accusation from Archer is Giddens's analytical conflation of agency and structure in his framework (Atkinson, 2007; King, 2010; Sawyer, 2005; van Rooyen, 2013). By contrast, Archer wants to treat individual/social or agency/structure as open to distinct and independent analysis, rather than being analytically interdependent (King, 2010; van Rooyen, 2013). She says,

> Ideally what [Giddens] wants to integrate is the way in which the active creation of social conditions is itself unavoidably conditioned by needing to draw upon structural factors in the process. (Archer 2010 [1982], p.229)

[1] Walter Buckley (1967) Sociology and Modern Systems Theory.

But, she argues, his approach to social structure is 'over-integrated' (c.f., p.228) and Giddens disregards 'existing efforts to perform the same task of re-uniting structure and action from within general systems theory (c.f.,p.227). Archer elaborates a morphogenetic approach to engage with the dichotomy between agency and structure in order to distinguish her approach from Giddens's over-conflation (2010[1982]).

Archer's morphogenesis emphasises capacities for change (Scambler, 2012a). Her social ontology is rooted in critical realist Roy Bhaskar's account of social practices (Herepath, 2014; Mutch, 2015; Scambler, 2012a). For example, Scambler (2012a) argues that Archer's view of an essential division of agency/structure resonates with Bhaskar's notion of 'duality of structure' (c.f. Archer, 2007b). Bhaskar described the relation between agency and structure as 'existentially interdependent but essentially distinct' (1989, cited in Scambler, 2012b, p.146). He explained the term 'duality of structure' in this way: 'Society is both ever-present condition and continually reproduced outcome of human agency: this is the duality of structure.' (*ibid*). It is worth noting that Bhaskar's description here appears – at least superficially – to be remarkably similar to Giddens's account of structure and agency. If Archer is indeed influenced by Bhaskar, this further clouds the issue as to whether Archer's and Giddens's approaches to the structure-agency 'problem' are as different as Archer claims.

In contrast to Archer and some other scholars (e.g. Herepath, 2014; Mutch, 2015; Scambler, 2012a, b; van Rooyen, 2013) who mainly concentrate on pursuing distinctions between Archer's and Giddens's frameworks, King (2010) exposes an irony in this theoretical debate, that Giddens's and Archer's social ontologies are essentially equivalent because they both work on explaining the power of the subjectivity of agency, albeit from different theoretical perspectives. The ultimate consequence of the relationship between agency and structure is either the reshaping or the reproduction of social structure by agents' actions. Individuals' capacities to shape and reproduce are explicated in Giddens's structuration (1984) and Archer's

morphogenesis (2010[1982]). Giddens stresses that individuals are reflexive and determinative in who they want to become (1991), while Archer's view of the priority of agency over structure is an even clearer expression of this idea. She states that 'social identity is necessarily a sub-set of personal identity' (Archer, 2003, p.120). In this respect, King asserts that Giddens and Archer share an optimistic view of human agency in the reconstruction of social relations and both make insightful contributions to understanding agency/structure and individual/social dichotomies (2010).

- Internal conversation and modes of reflexivity

Archer coins the term 'internal conversation' as the answer to the question '*How* (original italics) does structure influence agency?' (2007b, p.42) Her elaboration of the term is clever and intricate. She (2003, 2007a, b) conceptualises individuals' internal conversations as the 'interplay' (2007b, p.42) between the powers of personal subjectivity and social objectivity and depicts its nature as heterogeneous. 'Self-talk', 'self-consciousness' and 'inner dialogue' are also used as synonyms of 'internal conversation' in Archer's work (e.g. see Archer, 2007a, pp.62-63). This mental activity has considerable power to shape and guide our actions and thereby reform social structure (Herepath, 2014; Goodman, 2016). Under the governance of the 'inner eyes' (Archer, 2003, p.21), the self/personal identity is dominant, as discussed earlier; while social identity serves as 'a sub-set of personal identity' (*ibid*, p.120).

Reflexivity is the capacity of individuals to carry out 'internal conversations'. In other words, reflexivity can answer the question 'How does internal conversation work in forming the self and reforming structure?' as well. Archer defines reflexivity as 'mediation' between structure and agency in the following statement:

> The subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action and are thus indispensable to explaining social outcomes. (Archer, 2007a, p.5)

Given the heterogeneous nature of internal conversations, reflexivity cannot be confined to a single modality, or described as being the same process in all situations or individuals. Archer, then, identifies four 'ideal' modes of reflexivity (see Table 2.1.3), led by two empirical studies (2003[2] and 2007[3] study). Her previous study was based on just 20 people. To increase the generalisability of her hypothesis, she recruited 128 people for her later study. Apart from 6 unclassified and 3 'refuseniks', all her subjects in her later study were categorised into the four 'ideal' modes (Archer, 2007a, p.335). She uses her subjects' occupational concerns and types of social mobility as 'a concrete point of reference' (*ibid*, p.4) to examine reflexivity. Archer is aware of the tentativeness of her research findings. She lists some to-be-answered questions to encourage further studies (2007a, p. 92):

1. Were these four modes general to the (British) population?
2 Were they exhaustive or did further modes of reflexivity remain to be detected?
3. Were these four modes mutually exclusive or overlapping?
4. Were the differences in the modalities practiced causally related to subjects' social origins or to social outcomes?
5. How stable or mutable were these modes of reflexivity over the life course?

It is worth pointing out that in these two studies Archer switches from 'modes of reflexivity' to a typology of 'reflexives' (people) to elaborate her hypothesis of modes of reflexivity. Her subjects were categorised by identifying which mode of reflexivity appeared as the dominant one. For example, communicative reflexives are those whose dominant mode is communicative reflexivity. This is a fundamental shift of perspective throughout all her discussions.

[2] In Archer's book *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*
[3] In Archer's book *Making Our Way Through the World: human reflexivity and social mobility*

Communicative reflexives:	Those whose internal conversations require completion and confirmation by others before resulting in courses of action.
Autonomous reflexives:	Those who sustain self-contained internal conversations, leading directly to action.
Meta-reflexives:	Those who are critically reflexive about their own internal conversations and critical about effective action in society.
Fractured reflexives:	Those whose internal conversations intensify their distress and disorientation rather than leading to purposeful courses of action.

Table 2.1.3 Modes of reflexivity (adopted from Archer, 2007a, p.93)

Four ideal modes of reflexivity emerge from Archer's empirical studies:

Communicative reflexivity endorses context continuity, where people's internal conversation is closely influenced by their social contexts and contacts. Those who deliberate in this thinking mode will militate against their social mobility (Archer, 2003).

Autonomous reflexivity arises in the situation of 'contextual discontinuity' (Archer, 2007a, p.98), where people's internal conversation is self-monitored with little influence from 'others' and is likely to accomplish social mobility.

Meta-reflexivity, as its name suggests, is a mode of thinking about how we think (Goodman, 2016; Scambler, 2012 a, b). People are self-critical in this mode by questioning themselves about why they behaved or are acting in certain ways.

Fractured reflexivity emerges in the situation of contextual incongruity. According to Archer (2003, 2007a), people who are dominated by this mode will fail to discern their relationships with society and will end up with inaction.

Three patterns [4] of her subjects emerge from Archer's empirical investigations:

- The 'thought and talk' pattern

Those exhibiting this behaviour are described as 'communicative reflexives'. Members of this sub-group, for example, Graham, are active agents who can initiate the internal conversation, but need 'external consultation' (2003, p. 168) to complete it and guide their action. Communicative reflexives are those who think external consultation is more trustworthy than their own internal conversation and who sustain relatively close connection with 'others' such as their family and friends and self-consciously act as subordinates to 'others'. The consequence of communicative reflexivity is 'contextual replication' (*ibid*, p.209). This outcome resembles Bourdieu's description of social reproduction, but Bourdieu did not specify the process of habitus (re)formation in detail as Archer does. Habitus is portrayed as more of a response or a readjustment to social structure, not mediated by reflexivity. While reflexivity in Archer's approach constitutes individuals' inner capacity leading to their courses of action; it is conscious and reflexive. Additionally, Bourdieu's account and explanation of social relations seem to be confined to a single mode in the notion of habitus and adaptation to the 'field', while reflexivity offers to explain the diversity of social and individual changes triggered in late modernity. Another difference is their stances on the role of social structure. In Bourdieu's theory, it dominates – even determines - individuals' actions, while Archer labels social structure as 'only condition[s]', that is it forms the contextual circumstances (2003, p.289)

[4] Archer's fourth pattern of reflexives is fractured reflexives. Archer herself is not at all clear about the mode of fractured reflexivity and the category of reflexives. In her pervious study, she (2003) subdivides fractured reflexives, for example, as ''impeded communicative reflexive' (p.307), 'impeded autonomous reflexive' (p.313), 'displaced communicative reflexive' (p.321 and p.328) and 'near non-reflexivity' (p.333). In her later book (2007a), she even decides to leave fractured reflexives as a further discussion in her next book. Additionally, in my research, I did not come across any explicit cases or accounts demonstrating their fractured reflexivity came into effect nor could they be categories into the category of fractured reflexives. So, I mainly justified these three patterns of reflexives in my thesis.

which can be utilized as resources. Her stance gives reflexivity decisive powers to contribute to human actions.

- The autonomous pattern

The second category of reflexives identified by Archer is the 'autonomous' pattern, those who understand social constraints but are able to activate their agential powers and make use of the structural resources in their life. Nevertheless, Archer (2003) reminds us that autonomous reflexives are not those who are 'the masters of their fate' (p. 253). They are active agents with strategies for what they want to attain; their action is task-oriented. Different from communicative reflexives who are agents for stability, autonomous reflexives act for change. Thus, Archer (2003) claims that autonomous reflexives are capable of accomplishing their goals and make social mobility possible. Farat is one of the autonomous reflexives identified amongst Archer's subjects (2003). Briefly, in Farat's case, strong effects of communicative reflexivity from her Asian-based family were exerted on her earlier phase of life when her father monitored her life; after Farat became financially independent, left her parents' family and became a working mother, she felt she gradually took control of her life again. It took Farat much time to build up self-knowledge and self-confidence. From then on, Farat becomes determined about her life project and never expresses any self-distrust. Archer's comment on Farat is that she is an agent 'who makes things happen, rather than a passive [agent] to whom things just happen' (p.254). This statement is similar to the description of individuals in later modernity in Giddens's (1991) words: 'We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves.' (p.75). This 'coincidence' provides evidence for King's (2010) argument that Giddens's and Archer's approaches to the agency/structure dichotomy are not contradictory.

- The pattern of reflecting about reflexivity

The third pattern of reflexives emerging in Archer's empirical investigations is meta-reflexives. Every 'normal'[5] person, according to Archer, is engaged in meta-reflexivity, at least occasionally. Those who are dominated by this mode of reflexivity are identified and categorised by Archer as the meta-reflexives pattern. Archer defines her subjects of this pattern as 'idealist agents' (2003, p.258) because they never stop searching for self-knowledge and seeking for a life they really want to live. Thus, they are self-critical. However, even if they can accomplish inner control of themselves, not every external condition is under their control, for example, an absence of a team member. This leads to a hypothesis that meta-reflexives are 'social critics' (Archer, 2003, p.258). Meanwhile, they have to pay the price for being meta-reflexives. For example, Andy, a meta-reflexive in Archer's interviews, was seeking his ideal job, but at that moment there were no jobs open for him that met his ideal. Andy decided not to surrender to current constraints but to wait a few more years for his ideal job; in the meantime, he did some temporary work and earned a low salary. He realised that was the price he needed to pay for living a life he wanted.

Meta-reflexives often dwell in contextual incongruity. Generally, they are daydreamers on a quest for their value-commitment. By contrast, Archer claims autonomous reflexives are hard-working practitioners; they are concerned with 'technical proficiency and adequacy of personal qualifications' (2007a, p.131).

Wisely, Archer does not urge us to draw final conclusions from this hypothesis of ideal reflexive types. Given that most subjects with salient meta-reflexivity all failed to objectively seek their ideal occupations, Archer (2007a) raises questions to readers that if these meta-reflexives could become objectively successful, would sustaining their success become their

[5] Archer does not define who 'normal' people are in her work, but just uses the notion. (see Archer, 2003, p.255; Archer, 2007a, p.231)

orientation and change them into autonomous reflexives? Then, she leaves the readers to search for answers themselves.

In an overall summary, Archer remarks that communicative reflexives' thinking patterns are 'traditional' because subjectively they accept the impact of 'contextual continuity' (2003, p.289). Autonomous reflexives' thinking patterns are 'strategic' (*ibid*) because they act strategically by taking advantage of their surrounding contextual conditions and they are aware of making good use of their capacities to accomplish their goals. Meta-reflexives' thinking patterns are idealistic because they seek for 'free choice' and 'right action' rather than objectively for the largest possibility (Archer, 2003).

A hybrid ontology?

Bourdieu, Giddens and Archer initiated attempts to transcend sociological dichotomies such as structure/agency and social/individual. Their attempts provide valuable insight into the nature of the dichotomies but have also inspired criticism. Bourdieu's habitus has been accused of over-determinism because habitus will finally lead to social reproduction and contextual continuity leaving little if any space for personal agency (Jerkin, 1992, 2000 cited in Sweetman, 2003, p.529). Reflexivity, as a resolution of the agency-structure dichotomy in Archer's paradigm in particular, has also been criticised. Holmes (2011) remarks that reflexivity will retain 'a relational production' in terms of gendered identity (at least), in contemporary society (p.194): reflexivity cannot make each individual absolutely free from external connections. Even in contexts with a relatively high degree of social mobility, some social stratifications, for example, class and gender, seem not easily broken (Boyne, 2002). McNay (1999) asserts that women are still regarded as 'reflexivity losers', given the contextual strength of gender-based structures, arguing that 'the acquisition of gender identity' is entitled to them and 'enacted at a pre-reflexive level' (p.101).

Adams (2006) and Sweetman (2003), suggest a potential resolution of the challenge of hybrising reflexivity and habitus in identity formation study, and coin the terms 'habitual reflexivity' and 'reflexive habitus' (Sweetman, 2003, p.528). On the one hand, Sweetman defends habitus as offering space for individuals 'to be themselves'. In Bourdieu's words, habitus 'realises itself' (1990, p.116), because it forms in the process of conditioning. In various occupational settings, for example, people adopt various positional behaviours when they enter different working fields. Because they have a 'feel for the game' (*ibid*, p.61), they can readjust and conduct various habituses to suit the contextual surroundings. Sweetman further points that due to rapid shifts in all fields including the economic and social in the contemporary world, agency is provided more room 'to play' in social field (2003); furthermore, previous boundaries between fields are blurring (Boyne, 2002); fields themselves can be (re)structured and individual identity formed in them has obtained more possibilities to be reformed through human reflexivity capacities.

On the other hand, reflexivity cannot be fully independent from social structures (Adams, 2006; Sweetman, 2003). Even in the flux of late modernity, individuals are constructed within certain ingrained social structures, such as policies and laws, at least. Furthermore, class and gender are not easily reworked, and still play significant roles in identity formation (Adkins, 2004). Adams (2003) also warns that even if reflexivity is permitted maximum freedom, it is still understood, interpreted and practiced within the limited knowledge and 'cultural symbols already available to us' (*ibid*, p.225) or the 'anonymous authorities' in Erich Fromm's (1969, p.105) writings (for Fromm's full statements see p.22 in this chapter).

In trying to hybridise habitus and reflexivity, Adams (2003, 2006) and Sweetman (2003) suggest not adopting either of the concepts alone to understand the complexity of social relations. Ideally, both of the notions can serve as thinking tools to negotiate the relations between agency and structure rather than create a larger gap. But the authors fail to suggest

how this hybridisation might proceed; for example, what is the appropriate proportion of habitus and reflexivity in the process of hybridisation? Hybridisation might be 'a kind of utopian reconciliation' (Elliot, 2011, p.xv). Nevertheless, Adams and Sweetman inspire a dialectical perspective to see social relations and the process of self-formation in these interrelations. This perspective is of great help in doing my research because my initial purpose is to return to students the right to speak for themselves; I cannot decide - on both ethical and methodological grounds - whether their habitus or reflexivity play the dominant role in their personal development in TU and how they work. The students are the only ones who practice their development and their accounts are the only evidence that might reveal this process.

2.1.4 Chinese local theories in understanding 'Chinese' identity

Zhai (2017) suggests Chinese social researchers should attempt to consider Chinese local theories because this is a better way to explain issues in Chinese society than merely by borrowing Western theories. He briefly reviews two renowned local theories - Lin Yutang's 'family system' (2011 [1936], p.182) in his collected essays *My Country and My People* (2011 [1936]), and Fei Hsiao-tung's *chaxugeju* in his sociological work on Chinese society *From the Soil – the foundations of Chinese society* (1992[1947]).

Lin and Fei both assert that Chinese communities were built on the unit of the family but the concept of 'society' amongst Chinese remained weak. Social structural forces are imposed on Chinese people through their family. Lin argues that there are 'three muses' controlling over China in this family system, namely, 'Face, Fate and Favor' (2011 [1936], p.186). The three muses were born in Chinese traditions, including Confucian ideology and Chinese religious norms. In Confucian ideology, the ideal society should be one in which 'administration is simple and the punishments are light' (*ibid*).

The country should be ruled by *ren*[6] and the ruler should be the role model for his subjects, establishing a harmonious society for these subjects. That was the 'favor' they should appreciate.

'Fate' seems to be religious, although the concept of religion in China is vague because various rulers tended to make Confucianism the only orthodoxy (Zhai, 2017). However, there does seem to be room for religion in Chinese society, such as Taoism and Buddhism (Lin, 2011[1936]). Interestingly, according to Zhai (2017), Chinese people seem to have a closer connection with Taoism and Buddhism than with the orthodoxy, Confucianism, established through these rulers because, as Zhai (2017) notes, Taoism and Buddhism provide ordinary people with a possibility to connect with their ancestors. Family is central in Chinese society and connection with the late ancestors provides individuals' family continuity and constitutes part of Chinese traditional ritual (Zhai, 2017). Additionally, religion in China creates a fear of the unknown through, for example, ghosts and fate; this fear helps to solidify people's belief of a pre-designated and immutable fate in their lifetime, from their birth to death. Together with support from the concept of fate in Confucianism, Chinese people tend to attribute their lives to 'fate'. There is 'fate' in Confucianism as well. It refers to the role/*ming* (name), which demands that people should do the correct things required by their role/fate.

'Face' often used to refer to '*mianzi*' is actually difficult to define and translate (Lin, 2011[1936]). Lin (*ibid*) claims '[Chinese Face] is like honour and is not honour', and 'it is amenable, not to reason but to social convention' (p.190). He sets some examples to clarify what Chinese *mianzi* is in Chinese conventions. For example, an official who broke the traffic rules would gain a lot of *mianzi*, when the local police dare not punish him due to his power;

[6] *Ren* (benevolence or humanness) is overwhelmingly believed as the core of Confucianism (Fung, 1976; Li, 2017; Zhai, 2017), which aims to infuse people with the thoughts of loving and caring each other and forming harmonious relationships with each other. Confucius inculcated his disciples to fulfil all their social obligations, only through which, they could become *ren ren* (man) – a person with 'perfect virtues' (Fung, 1976).

and for saving her *mianzi*, when a Chinese girl's body was accidently seen by a man, she must commit suicide. Saving their own and other '*mianzi*' in this way made traditional Chinese society 'too human' and blocked its advance (Lin, 2011[1936], p.192).

Although Lin does not directly link '*mianzi*' with Chinese students' personal development, some modern scholars and educators both Chinese and Western (e.g. Hue, 2007; Jin and Cortazzi, 2006; Lv et. al., 2015; Wen & Clement, 2003) try to legitimate the role of '*mianzi*' in the research of Chinese students. They argue that Chinese students are silent learners without questioning what is taught for saving '*mianzi*'. Zhai (2017) further maintains that the behaviour of saving face/'*mianzi*' actually reflects an attempt to meet the expectation of self-perfection required by one's *ming* (name) or role in Confucian values. Specifically, Chinese students are used to keeping silent in the classrooms because they think the role of Chinese students require them to respect their teachers and behave themselves. Thus, they should behave well and do the correct things.

Zhai (2017) maintains that 'the three muses' retain their influences on contemporary Chinese people, though less deeply (and perhaps less observable in a 'social noise' of other forces and beliefs) than on prior generations.

Another named Chinese anthropologist Fei Hsiao-tung (1996 [1947]) coins a term *chaxugeju*, the circles of kinships, to depict Chinese social connections in the countryside in particular. Fei claims the rural society is significant and fundamental to the whole Chinese society. '*Cha*' in Chinese means 'being different'; '*xu*' means 'orders'. *Chaxugeju* is translated as 'differential mode of association' (by Hamilton & Zheng, in Fei's book, 1996[1947], p.71) composed of multiple circles. The centre of each circle is the individual; one circle links other circles to weave a kinship network through 'personal relationships' (*ibid*) with each other, for example, parents-children, husband-wife, and the elder-the younger siblings; these personal

relationships construct social connections in Chinese rural society. Fei (1996[1947]) argues that *chaxugeju* is built on nonequivalent connections and traced back to Confucian ethics for a foundation for his statement. For example, he claims filial piety in Confucian ethics is based on hierarchical orders (*xu*), in which children are expected to obey their parents and paretns should commit their obligations as parents to their children. In *chaxugeju*, each individual is expected to behave as what the order (*xu*) or 'ritual' (*ibid*, p. 94) in each circle requires him/her to do[7]. He (1996[1947]) describes this expected personal behaviour as a self-restraint, or *ke ji fu li*, 'control oneself and conform to rituals' in Confucianism (p.66). Fei's claims point out that in *chaxugeju*, although each individual constitutes the centre of each circle in the entire kinship network, there is no independent 'self' beyond each individual's social role.

Although Fei's notion of *chaxugeju* and Lin's concept of 'Three Muses' seem seldom to be drawn on in empirical studies about the construction of Chinese society, the idea of family as a core and *mianzi* in Chinese society are of help and value in contemporary research literature on Chinese young people in cross-cultural contexts in particular (e.g. Fang & Huang, 2020; Hwang et al., 2002; Lin, 2008; Lv et. al., 2015; Pang et al., 2005).

Pang et al. (2015) studied experiences and choices among Chinese young people living in Australia. Their interview data from 12 Chinese students, whose ages ranged between 10 and 15, reveal that Chinese young people's experiences and choices in physical activity can be attributable to their family values. For example, some participants admitted that they chose to learn music because their parents thought it was good for their future; otherwise, they would fail their parents or waste their parents' educational investments in them. They gave priority to their family in making decisions.

[7] See Chapter 8 *A Rule of Ritual* in Fei's book, pp. 94-100.

Family influence is also found in Lin's (2008) and Fang and Huang's (2020) studies of overseas Chinese young people's identity conflicts. Although the findings on the importance of such influence differ in the two studies, the concept of family plays as an influential factor in explaining and understanding Chinese young adults' identity development. Based on questionnaire responses from 186 and 263 Chinese youths in New Zealand and Singapore respectively, Lin (2008) argues that 'social interactions and relationships with the host society played the most significant role in predicting Chinese young adults' level of identity conflict', compared with the importance of family ethics (p.140). Fang and Huang (2020) find many Chinese participants in Canada (22 in total) claimed they succeeded in blending their bi-cultural identity in between the influences of the host context and their families, despite encountering cultural conflicts.

Hwang et al.'s (2012) and Lv et al's (2015) studies illustrate one reason why Chinese students are widely identified as silent learners, that is for saving '*mianzi*' or 'face'. To avoid expressing themselves incorrectly in front of other classmates and their teacher, some Chinese students tend to keep silent in the classroom, although they would like to communicate with others (Lv et al., 2015). They fear losing their own and their family's *mianzi* if they fail to answer teachers' questions correctly (Hwang et al., 2012).

Inspired by these studies employing Chinese concepts of Chinese culture 'concepts' to depict and understand Chinese young people, I decided to borrow them as thinking tools to guide my research. Since my students are involved in a cross-cultural context, looking through both Western and Chinese cultural lenses may help me understand my students better and analyse their identity formation in TU more fruitfully.

2.1.5 Theoretical guidelines for my thesis

This sub-section constitutes a summary of the first part of this literature review- a review of modes/theories in college student identity formation.

Also, it discusses how these readings have inspired me to develop theoretical guidelines for my thesis. Through my reading, I have decided not to let my students prove modes/theories by fitting them into a certain category but to employ modes/theories to serve for my research. Under this consideration, a modified version of grounded theory is employed in my research because this provides me with a bottom-to-top approach to my students' identity formation based on my data (see details in section 3.8.1).

I have used Arnett's proposal of emerging adulthood as a distinct identity development stage as a broad starting point for my work, followed by an investigation of various modes/theories of college identity formation in two major academic disciplines, psychological (agency-dominant identity study) and sociological (structure-dominant identity study). Psychological approaches to identity formation are mainly devoted to analysing what is one's 'authentic' self - the personal/self/ego identity defined by theorists and researchers in that discipline - and how one can (re)establish it through following specific stages or steps identified by those theorists and researchers (e.g. ego-identity development by Marcia, 1966; seven vectors of college students development by Chickering, 1999). However, from sociological perspectives, generally, researchers switch their attention to how HE structures influence the formation of students' identity (e.g. the college impact theory of student development by Feldman & Newcomb, 1994). Although in both approaches to college student identity formation, the relationships between college students and the institution in which they are located are examined, each identifies a different dominant formational influence. Specifically, from psychological perspectives, college students as active agents can manipulate their engagement with the HE structures to develop themselves; in sociological approaches, experiences in the HE institution will 'construct' students' identity to a greater extent.

I did not intend to deny the validity of either of the two major approaches to college student identity formation, but neither of them alone looked feasible for uncovering my participants' identity formation in the TU context.

In this respect, some scholars' advocacy of studying the relationship between agency and structure by introducing some form of mediation between them inspired me to look into my participants' identity formation from a third perspective, by paralleling students' agency and the structural powers affecting them in their life trajectories at TU (e.g. Archer, 2003, 2007a, b; Bourdieu, 1979, 1997; Burke & Stets, 2009). I regarded these scholars' ideas as thinking tools to guide my entire research.

Burke and Stets (2009) suggest studying identity using an integrated approach. They articulate the interrelations amongst the three bases - person, role and group- in identity formation. Briefly, a person's self-identity cannot be entirely disentangled from her social identity and vice versa, because the person's social identity is formed within the group she is involved in through roles she is playing in this group; meanwhile, the roles the person is playing contribute to the constitution of her 'self' or self-identity. In this approach, Burke and Stets (2009) do not deliberately separate self- and social identity as some earlier identity researchers have done (e.g. Eric Erikson, 1996[1950]; George Mead, 1967[1934], cited in Elliott, 2011, p.11), when examining identity formation; their idea of an integrated approach informs my research.

Moreover, my research also discusses the *process* of identity formation amongst these students. For this purpose, Archer's modes of reflexivity and Bourdieu's habitus (embodied dispositions) provide me with useful thinking tools to examine the relationship between agency and structure, the core concern in identity formation in my research. The 'structure' in my research is worth discussing. My research context is an odd situation with its Chinese and British mixture of cultural and educational structures; it is located in China, but it is expected to provide 'real' British educational and cultural experiences to Chinese students. The advent of late modernity (in Britain) in Archer's words - the prerequisite of her hypothesis of the four modes - may be reflected in the British cultural and educational structures at TU. And the 'family system' as the paradigm of Chinese social construction in some

Chinese scholars' works (cf. Lin, 2011[1936]; Fei, 1992[1947]) may help to explain part of Chinese structural influences on these participants. Together with the 'family system', modes of reflexivity and habitus will be held to bear on constructing the theoretical frameworks for understanding and analysing my participants' identity formation process.

Bourdieu (in Wacquant, 1989), together with Yang (2014) and Reay (2010), does not deny the role of a person's reflexivity and agency as I have discussed earlier, although the conception of 'reflexivity' is not exactly the same as that in Archer's works. My research mainly draws on the basic connotation of reflexivity as the process through which an individual mediates the role of her/his agency and the influences from this Sino-British cooperatively educational structure that she/he is located in, rather than focusing on distinguishing this concept in the two scholars' works. In my research, Archer's contribution of the four modes of reflexivity will be borrowed to describe stages in my participants' identity formation process. Each mode in Archer's work is actually described as being the 'dominant mode' adopted by a person of a particular 'type' (2007a, p.114), but in reality, individuals do not merely practice one dominant mode of reflexivity, but multiple modes simultaneously (Baker, 2019; Dyke et al, 2012); so, Archer's modes of reflexivity are not necessarily understood as four ultimate types of persons/reflexives but might be used to explain the process of persons' mediation of agency and structure in my research.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus also plays a significant part in the investigation and understanding of my participants' identity formation. Archer objects to taking a position of social determinism in her discussion of the mediation between agency and structure in late modernity, and I agree with her argument. Nevertheless, the usefulness of habitus as a thinking tool should not be denied because it does allow some space for a person's reflexivity, as I discussed earlier (c.f. 'mismatch' in Yang's assumption, 2014; the consciousness in Reay's research, 2010).

In the following part, I will review the research literature on Chinese students' lived experiences and learning dispositions and how this literature addresses the question of who Chinese students are. Since the students in my study are studying in a particular Sino-British cooperative educational context, the research on Chinese students' overseas experiences offers some relevance and is worth reviewing; it is anticipated that there will be some similarities between studying in TU and going to study abroad. A fundamental difference between the situations of these two groups is that the larger environment outside classroom of TU is Chinese, and this can be predicted to play a significant part in TU students experiences.

2.2 Chinese students' learning experiences and dispositions

This sub-section aims to justify two points: 1) What does the research literature tells us about the learning experiences and dispositions that Chinese students are likely to have had before coming to TU?, and 2) What do we know of Chinese students in overseas higher education institutions about these experiences and dispositions?

Briefly, before going to university, Chinese students are expected to complete three basic stages of school education - primary, secondary and high school education (China.org.cn, 2006). Every Chinese child aged six is equally entitled to nine years free and compulsory education comprising six years primary education and three years education in junior school (The Central Government of People's Republic of China, 2006). The country has been working on implementing this education system for all and has achieved considerable success. Statistics illustrated that by 2020 the gross enrolment in compulsory education and high school education in China had reached 95.2% and 91.2% respectively (MoE, 2021). Meanwhile, the college enrolment rate has also been rising. Before the massive expansion in HE in China in 1999 (MoE, 1998), college enrolment rate was very low (e.g. 9.76 % in 1998) (Chu,2019), while by 2020, 54.4% of Chinese high school students

were admitted into HEIs (MoE, 2021). The central government continues to direct and permit the expansion of HE and the next audit agenda in HE expansion is to raise the gross enrollment of college to 60% by 2025 (Zhang, 2021). This phenomenon in education illustrates what Kipnis (2011) has depicted as an 'educational desire' in China. The 'massification' and the ensuing quality stratification[8] of HE has also raised the importance of High School and the *Gaokao* (the college entrance examination) for individual advancement. Helping students to go to a high-ranking university is regarded as the first mission of Chinese high school (HS) education (see *Mao Tanchang* Middle School of Anhui Lu'an as one 'famous' example in China: Dou, 2013). HS experiences correspondently infuse inter-peer competition, focus on stress and lead to teacher-centred and examination (*Gaokao*)-driven teaching and learning.

Before moving on, I shall insert some current news published online by many Chinese mass media — 高考百日誓师会 (*Gaokao bairi shishihui*) (e.g. see bilibili-*Gaokao* kick-off meeting, 2021; Hunan Education Online, 2021; Li, 2021; Ren, 2021; Sun et al., 2021) — to generally picture how very significant education is in the Chinese public's minds and to let the reader gain a broad picture of the educational context of Chinese students before going to university, thereby helping the reader to understand my students' accounts about their previous dispositions before coming to TU.

This news is fairly usual in China, in reporting a 'kick-off' meeting regularly held every early March, 100 days before *Gaokao* (*Gaokao* usually starts from June 6th each year) in most Chinese high schools. Apart from *Gaokao* candidates and teachers, their parents are often invited to attend the kick-off meeting to watch their children make a *Gaokao* pledge. Students and teachers are reported to think highly of this kick-off meeting and consider it the turning point for high school students because they are going to take

[8] By 2020, there are 3005 HEIs in China, including 1272 undergraduate educational institutions (first tier 一本 and second tier 二本). Among them, there are only 35 Project 985 universities and 112 Project 211 (MoE, 2021).

Gaokao – the ultimate goal for almost every Chinese student (e.g. Li, 2021; Hunan Education Online, 2021; Ren, 2021; Sun et al., 2021). Chinese students are expected to strive for this goal and 'win' in the *Gaokao* (Wei, 2019; Yang, 2017; Zhang, 2017), and become 'talents' (*rencai*) in the future (Wu, 2020). A good *Gaokao* result is supposed to be the object of their desire and is often seen as a symbol of a 'good' student and even a validation to the wider Chinese public of the individual's ability and even 'intelligence' and 'human quality' (*suzhi*), promising in turn the student's future performance, although many people criticise this stereotype (Zhao, 2020; Zheng, 2020).

2.2.1 Chinese students' experiences and dispositions in Chinese education

'Chinese students' learning experiences and dispositions' have been widely investigated and debated in the existing research literature. These investigations probably started from and continue in an interest in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes, mainly aiming to enhance understanding between the 'English' teachers and their Chinese students and often drawing on an assumption and an appeal that there are divergences between 'the Chinese way' of learning and 'the Western way' (e.g. Biggs, 1996, 1998; Murphy, 1987; Raymond & Choon, 2017; Rodrigues, 2005). Both Chinese and Western researchers seem to tend to look for a normative description of the 'Chinese' learning experiences and dispositions; this commonly takes the form of, rote learning and thinking actively though not performing actively in class rooted in Chinese cultures seems to be a widely accepted one (e.g. Lv et al., 2015; Lee, 1999[1996]; Ning et al., 2012).

Murphy (1987), who might be the first Western observer to have formally researched divergences in learning behaviour between Chinese (Hong Kong) and Western (Australian) students, explains that Chinese students' behaviour of accepting without questioning teachers, and keeping silent in the classroom in terms of their intention to build up and maintain a

harmonious relationship with the teacher. He proposes this disposition of Chinese students is 'an extension' (*ibid*, p.43) of the concept of filial piety based on *Wulun* (the five relationships in the traditional Chinese culture) in Confucianism. Other researchers have agreed with his statements and provide further 'support' for this Confucian cultural analysis in their observations of the 'normal' practice: Chinese teachers tend to be authoritarian and Chinese students are expected to respect and obey their teachers' authority (Biggs, 1996, 1998; Ginsberg, 1992; Li, 2001; Li et al., 2014; Ning et al., 2012).

There has been some attempt to search for Chinese students' 'achievement motivation' in Confucianism. Li (2001) is an example of a research who mounts an argument for strong Confucian influence on contemporary Chinese students' learning dispositions and practices. Without going into great detail, Li (*ibid*) seems to be driven by a desire to find Confucian influence rather than taking a more neutral initial position. Whether Confucian 'mode' of learning continue to influence modern Chinese learners is a debated issue.

Some other researchers have also looked for other and additional cultural roots for Chinese students' formal performances in the classroom. Watkins and Biggs[9] (works about Chinese students' learning experiences mainly published in the 1990s) argue that Chinese students' learning dispositions

[9] In the 1990s, researchers, such as Murphy (1987) and Watkins and Biggs (1996, 1998), could only access Hong Kong students and recorded their observation of those students' formal performances in the classroom. Biggs and Watkins (1996) assert that Hong Kong students can represent not only the mainland Chinese students but also students located in other Chinese culture-based societies, such as Singapore, by writing that '…our Hong Kong students indeed represent a general 'Chineseness', deriving from the Confucian heritage itself, that allows us to understand Chinese learners better, wherever they are in the world' in the book they edited *The Chinese Learners: cultural, psychological and contextual influences* (1996, p.269). They (*ibid*) attempt to convince readers that they can deal with this question over the 'Chineseness' of Hong Kong students in this way: 'While we argued that Hong Kong students are in many key aspects representative of a CHC [Confucian heritage culture], they are also unique' (p.275). This contradiction between being 'representatives' and also being 'unique' does not, however, prevent them from making generalised claims about 'the Chinese learner' while accepting that 'the majority of research reported in these chapters in based on students in Hong Kong.' (*ibid*).

may be rooted in the collectivism pedagogy pervasive in that era of Chinese modern education (see discussion of key concepts in Chinese modern education in Appendix I). Jin and Cortazzi (1996, 2006, 2017) provide another explanation of Chinese students' learning dispositions, using the concept of 'cultures of learning'. In their earlier research, they argue that it is the Chinese cultural influences, including Confucian culture and collectivism, that contribute to the widely observed characteristics of Chinese students' dispositions and formal performances in the classroom. Specifically, Confucian culture places a high social value on education and defines the roles of the teacher and the student and their relationships; while in collectivism, teaching is an activity that addresses the whole class rather than small groups or individualised. In such learning contexts, Chinese students are expected to learn effectively and deeply through listening, while teachers do not see the class size as a big problem but a 'given factor' (1998, p.742). In their later research, Jin and Cortazzi use the term 'active memorisation' (2006, p.9) and 'listening with mental activity' (2017, p.242) to further shed light on the 'cultures of learning' in the Chinese contexts. They (2006, 2017) seem to imply that, internally, Chinese students are inclined to employ silent learning from 'active memorisation' (2006, p.9). Such a tendency in learning may make classroom observers assume that their learning approach is 'rote' learning, with its negative connotations; whereas they are engaging in silent (but 'active') learning.

Interestingly, straightforward rote learning is a common teaching and learning method in EFL classes (Tinkhams, 1989; Kasgari, 2013). Biggs (1996) suspects that Western students may learn through memorisation and repetition as much as Chinese students when learning certain subjects. It seems that a rote learning disposition, however, is noticed and emphasised only in Asian learners, notably Chinese students, as a divergence from their Western counterparts and even a 'problem' in learning. Some researchers seem to predesignate Chinese students as Chinese-culture-determined or even 'programmed' and limit themselves to searching Chinese cultures for 'an essence' of Chinese students' learning dispositions that can be mobilized

as an explanation for observations (mainly) of formal performance in the classroom. In the end, they may trap themselves in 'Orientalisation' (Said, 1978) or even 'self-Orientalisation', as Chen (1992) appears to do.

Grounded in Arnett's (2000) notion of university as a place for college students as emerging adults to explore and develop themselves, Chinese college students must remain in their self-exploration process as their Western counterparts, although their development process and level would not be the same. In this respect, the connotations in the label of 'Chinese learners' – rote learning, caring about their scores, silent learners with no questioning of teachers, even if it is with an 'active mind' (added by Jin and Cortazzi, 2006) – are not sufficient to summarise their lived experiences in educational systems, let alone understand who Chinese students are. Thinking it from another orientation, if Chinese students can be simply labelled and essentialised, are all 'authentic Chinese' learners expected to behave in the way described in these labels. If there are students whose formal performances and learning dispositions do not match the expectation, should they still be defined as Chinese students/learners [10]?

Currently, students, the younger generation in China are changing rapidly beyond earlier researchers' expectations, under the influence brought by globalisation and in particular wide access to the Internet and other digital media. They are known as the digital generation because they spend so much time on the Internet (Li et al., 2015; Hockly, 2011; Sanchez et al., 2011). Almost nothing will hinder them from getting access to any 'global information sources' (p.231), as Negroponte (1996) anticipates in his book *Being Digital*. Hence, under such circumstances, if Chinese students are seen as cultural products as stated in much research literature (e.g.,

[10] Tian (2008) challenges the term 'Chinese learners'. Through her interview data on Chinese students' academic and non-academic learning experiences in a British university, she hypothesises that 'the Chinese learners' are 'learners from China', who have not been programmed by the Confucian cultures, as in Hofstede's notion of culture as mind programming (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Instead, the Chinese students in Tian's research (2008) were those who were evolving and readapting in that British university; they did not match the expectations of the label, Chinese-culture-determined learners.

Watkins & Biggs, 2001; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006, 2017), the influences on them are now more diverse than 'Confucianism'. The influence of diverse cultures can lead to a position in which contemporary students must make choices about their modes of learning and lifestyles. The exposure to multiple cultural influences opens up possibilities for change but also for personal agency.

2.2.2 Chinese students' lived experiences in overseas HE

Generally, in many investigations in the existing literature, overseas Chinese students are regarded narrowly as 'customers' or 'foreign students' who are coming to the host country to try to gain an international diploma (e.g. Gill, 2000; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Tian & Low, 2011; Ryan, 2016; Wu, 2015). Given this role, Chinese overseas students' learning experiences in the host university, in the classroom in particular, have become a widely-researched topic. Through investigating Chinese overseas students' learning dispositions, much research aims to suggest educational strategies to improve their satisfaction with the academic side of their experience (e.g. Choi & Nieminen, 2013; Cockrill, 2017; Durkin, 2008, 2011; Henze & Zhu, 2012; Kennedy, 2002; Kun & Berlin, 2013; Wu, 2015; Zhao et al., 2006). There is no doubt that academic achievement is of significance for these students, because they expect or are expected by their parents to gain a better employment prospect from studying abroad, and this is believed to be very dependent on their academic performance (Pinto & Pereira, 2019; van Mol, 2017). But enhancing employability is not the only reason why Chinese students study overseas. For example, Chao et al. (2017) and Chirkova et al. (2008) find various motivations for Chinese students to study abroad, including to enhance their employability, but also from an interest in Western cultures or to experience different lifestyles (*ibid*). They are students studying abroad as well as individuals living abroad. Nevertheless, much research continues to mainly focus on overseas Chinese students' learning experiences and dispositions in the host countries while paying less

attention to other important aspects in their life trajectory abroad, such as their personal growth.

Chinese culture determined?

In order to understand overseas Chinese students' learning dispositions, many researchers tend to trace their cultural basis back to Confucianism again (e.g. Zhou & Todman, 2008; Zhu, 2016). This is taken to imply that academic achievement is of great importance to these students because it is highly valued in this supposed cultural origin, as discussed in the previous section. Based on this Confucian Heritage Culture presentation of Chinese students, several studies have focused on their formal learning experiences in the classroom in the host countries. Although such studies cover various aspects of Chinese overseas students' learning experiences, such as their classroom participation (e.g. Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011), difficulties in group work (e.g. Burdett, 2013) and their adjustment to Western educational expectations such as critical thinking (e.g. Huang, 2008; Cockrill, 2017), they are all study-related issues, concerned with 'explaining' Chinese overseas students' behaviour in the classroom and suggesting strategies and solutions to the problems this engenders (e.g. Kennedy, 2002; Volet & Renshaw, 1996).

In general, overseas Chinese students are observed to be reluctant to participate vocally in classroom activities, keeping silent, but also that are described as lacking critical thinking dispositions, all of which form part of their 'learning dispositions' that are more widely observed in their home context, in the research literature I addressed in the previous section. Many observers, then, assume that these Chinese international students' learning dispositions have already been formed and established by Chinese educational expectations before entering the novel overseas learning context. Then they find Confucian education influences again (e.g. Kennedy, 2002; Kun & Berlin, 2013; Tan, 2011) as the main factor responsible for their different formal performance in the classroom; collectivist values,

which can include more recent cultural developments, such as the emphasis of obedience to the authority (e.g. Li & Rivers, 2018) and high teacher dependency (e.g. Su, 2012), are also recognised as reason for the passivity of Chinese overseas students. The impact on Chinese students' performance in formal classes stemming from Confucian and collectivist values have been discussed in the previous section and will not be repeated here.

Lacking critical thinking dispositions?

Critical thinking, which is reported as being highly valued in Western educational contexts, is seldom found in Chinese international students. Compared with their Western counterparts, Chinese overseas students appear to be unaccustomed to such thinking and questioning or, in many Western scholars' eyes, fail to master these abilities (Davies, 2013; Shaheen, 2016). Some researchers suggest that there are no critical thinking dispositions in Confucian culture, maintaining instead, that it is exclusive to Western cultures (Cuypers, 2004; Dam & Volman, 2004). Doubting this assertion, Tian and Low (2011) referring to the Confucian Classics, point out that in Confucian education 'asking' and 'thinking' were also highly valued. But what Confucius or his followers said only reflected educational ideals in ancient China. How much these remain influential on modern Chinese education remains a point of debate and/or empirical investigation (*ibid*). In this respect, Tian and Low (2011) propose that the behavioural characteristics of Chinese overseas students recorded through classroom observation, such as keeping silent or not questioning teachers, may stem from their prior educational habitus formed in the period of schooling in China, in the culture of Chinese classrooms. There is little empirical evidence to indicate that current educational norms in Chinese classrooms date back to Confucianism. Rather, Confucianism may be a convenient term borrowed from the history of Chinese education to explain every example of classroom behaviour that is different from that in the Western world (Liu & Littlewood, 1998). Tian and Lowe's (2013) empirical investigation finds that Chinese students may in fact have been trained to

conduct critical thinking in their previous education in China, before going to the UK. They point to the fact that Chinese universities are changing and gradually realising the importance of forming students' critical thinking dispositions, although perhaps not rapidly.

Lower command of English?

In addition to impacts from their home culture, English language becomes another frequently discussed cause of 'problems' in Chinese overseas students' academic experiences, such as their reluctance in classroom participation (e.g. Liu & Littlewood, 1998; Kirby et al., 1996; Zhu, 2016), low levels of intercultural engagement in group work (e.g. Burdett, 2013) and difficulties in critical thinking (e.g. Rear, 2017; Tian & Low, 2011; Wu, 2015). Some researchers argue that, when English is the medium of instruction, English fluency is decisive in Chinese students' academic cooperation with students from other countries. For example, Burdett (2013) maintains that, no matter how strongly the intercultural academic collaboration is advocated in an international classroom by the host university, the lack of fluency in English will weaken international students' engagement motivation. This partly explains why some Chinese overseas students feel dissatisfied with their academic experiences (Su, 2012). Burdett (2013), then, suggests a full language preparation for international students, as a way of countering this problem. The language barrier may even contribute to dissatisfaction towards their international learning journey (Su, 2012) and become another problem for Chinese overseas students to overcome.

By contrast, Cockrill (2017), who is also interested in Chinese overseas students' intercultural engagement, emphasises that the tendency to uncertainty avoidance of both host and international students makes it more difficult for them to engage in intercultural activities in the classroom or other contexts. He insists that the host students must share responsibility for this situation, arguing that they feel threatened by severe academic

competition with international students in the host classroom. They are, therefore, unwilling to work with international students and feel it is not necessary to make friends with them. He also accepts that international students also withdraw themselves from working with host students, probably because of a language barrier. Cockrill (2017) found that if the students in his study were allowed to self-select members for study groups, they willingly worked with co-national students, but intercultural academic collaboration did not happen automatically. In this respect, differing from Burdett's suggestion (2013), Cockrill (2017) advocates intensive intervention to promote cross-cultural collaboration between host and international students. The key difference between these two studies is in the placing of 'responsibility' for the observed lack of cross-cultural communication with the international students (Burdett, 2013) or with both host and international students (Cockrill, 2017).

Some researchers argue that language barriers may also contribute to Chinese overseas students' reported lack of critical thinking in the classroom (Huang, 2008; Tian & Low, 2011). For example, Tian and Low (2011) argue that Chinese students' English language deficiency may cause their reluctance to participate in the classroom, but this phenomenon should not be over-interpreted as a lack of critical thinking dispositions. Their silence may be attributed to their unfamiliarity with 'discourse terms' (p.72) used in the classroom context. Huang (2008) holds a similar view that a lack of observed critical thinking amongst Chinese overseas students may be explained by their relatively low level of command of English. He (*ibid*) points out that there might be a mismatch of understanding between Chinese international students and the Western tutors over the nature of critical thinking; the students may not think critically as expected by their tutors, but this may not mean they do not think critically in their own terms. Findings in Li and Wegerif's study (2014) of teaching thinking in Chinese classroom provide some evidence for Huang's argument. By investigating 22 Chinese secondary school teachers and their class (with 40 to 50 students in each class) in terms of teaching thinking in Chinese classroom, this study

(*ibid*) demonstrates that Chinese students have been taught to think in Chinese classroom and they have the capacity to practice critical thinking. The authors (2014) claim that Chinese teachers do teach thinking in their own way, however, which is based on Chinese cultures and unfamiliar with the Western critical thinking cultures. For example, these Chinese teachers teach students to think to achieve 'inner satisfaction' by considering their self 'in relation to others' (p.28) and to practice 'active silence' through 'inner reflection' (p.29).

Some other researchers have looked into the role of English in overseas Chinese students' experiences in the wider environment beyond the classroom. They argue that these students in the first place, as individuals, are similar to their Western counterparts in at least one respect, i.e., they also have the desire to make friends and establish social connections (e.g. Forbush & Foucault-Wells, 2016; Sawir, 2006; Sovic, 2009; Skyrme & White, 2011). English may remain the key sticking point hindering such connections. However, rather than emphasising the command of English, some Chinese overseas students stated that it was a lack of confidence in expressing themselves in English that hindered intercultural communication with students from other countries (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2016). One student in Spencer-Oatey et al.'s study interestingly took the position that English should not be regarded as a block on communication but as a communicative tool which can be willingly used however imperfect one's use may be (*ibid*). In other words, successful cross-cultural communication is more a matter of individual willingness and motivation than linguistic knowledge. In such an interpretation, the Chinese student as an individual may be rescued from cultural determinism and reduction to mere a member belonging to a cultural group.

A truth from Chinese overseas students

In contrast to researchers' concerns towards Chinese students' divergent performances compared with their Western counterparts, Chinese overseas

students themselves may not regard such divergence as a problem. As Durkin (2008, 2011) notes, the attitudes of Chinese overseas students in her studies toward 'full Western acculturation' (2008, p.42), which was highly expected by their lecturers, were generally negative. For example, some students interpreted the highly valued critical thinking as 'hurtful cynicism' (2008, p.48). Holmes (2008) similarly finds that Chinese students retain a belief in the value of social 'harmony' in communication. They, therefore, chose to keep silent in the classroom rather than be involved in an 'unharmonious' argumentation (*ibid*). Under the influence of their involvement in a Western educational context, they may form a 'middle way', neither Western nor Oriental, but a 'synergised' fusion. Durkin proposes that individuals' thinking patterns reflects their self-identity. She (2011) criticises much Western conceptualisation of 'doing' critical thinking as being separate from emotion and other psychological connections that are part of 'who we are'. Training Chinese overseas students to think in a Western way without expecting any psychological change seems no different from separating one's mind from the person (*ibid*). Durkin (2008, 2011) regards Chinese students as active agents with capacities to conduct their agency and decide their learning methods reflexively, rather than being simply re-formed or expected to be reformed in Western learning cultures. Wu (2015) also advocates regarding Chinese overseas students as evolving agents. In much of the current literature, these students enter Western universities with their 'origins', widely-described as 'silent' or 'resistant' learners which is continuously repeated in such writing on the overseas Chinese students; they are also found changing for various causes in response to the host educational context. He suggests examining Chinese overseas students from a developing perspective (*ibid*).

2.3 Three studies on Chinese students' personal development

Three studies that detail Chinese students' personal development have been identified as having particular relevance, each in its own way, to my own

research concerns, and are reviewed here: two on Chinese students studying in China (Cen, 2017; Yuan et al., 2019) and the third on Chinese students' identity formation in an American university (Li, 2013).

Li's (2013) thesis centres on 15 Chinese graduate students' identity development during the process of their acculturation in the host country (USA), using interviews as the primary data source. He examines their transitional process from five dimensions, namely, 'language barrier, academic adjustment, cultural adaptation, social adjustment and managing logistics' (2013, p.2). Accordingly and emerging from his data, he divides these students' identity into five themes, language, academic, cultural, social-emotional and logistical identities (*ibid*). Amongst the five themes, Li claims that language barrier/ language identity is the core in their process of acculturation because English language is necessary for them to accomplish readaptation in the other four categories. He concludes that these Chinese students all succeeded in re-exploring their self and accomplishing readaptation in the host country (Li, 2013). To analyse the 15 Chinese students' transition and adaptation to living in the USA, Li (2013) adopts Bronfenbrenner's (1993) Ecology of Human Development Theory in which, the ontology of identity is structurally dominated.

Cen's (2017) work is concerned with learning outcomes of Chinese college students studying in China. Drawing on statistics from the National Survey of Student Engagement-China (NSSE-China) and a large number of semi-structured interviews with students, she intends to provide a generalised result that Chinese students in Chinese universities can actively engage in their learning and develop their 'knowledge, skills, personal awareness and social competence' (2017, p.39) through their engagement in four domains: curricular, co-curricular, extracurricular and other domains. In contrast to Li's (2013) structural-determinist stance, Cen follows the path led by self-authorship (Kegan, 1994, cited in Baxter Magolda & King, 2010, p.492). She asserts that Chinese college students are all active agents who can dictate who they are going to become and what achievements they are going to

pursue, and who will attain their goals through their active engagement in university, independently from the particular HE institutional structural forces. Li studies college student identity formation from a structural dominance perspective, while Cen employs a cognitive-structural approach (see pp. 20-22, section 2.1.1).

Both Cen's (2017) and Li's (2013) interpretations of Chinese students' lived experience tend to emphasise a single factor triggering personal change and development, either the power of the self or social structural forces, respectively. Taken together their analyses suggest there is a tension between these two factors, but recognition of this tension helps me to move my own thinking forward in terms of seeking means to combine them. Evidence for this possible combination can be seen in Li's and Cen's writings. The self and the context are mutually related as discussed in a previous section (2.1.3). Although Li (2013) sheds light on the influence of the host environment, he cannot deny the deeply-rooted influence of Chinese international students' prior values and beliefs – internalized in themselves in their self-identity as Chinese – which were not changed by the host environment. On the other hand, Cen (2017) accepts the power of self-authorship, but she also claims that most participants understand themselves through their 'external connections' with others, such as their parents and friends: they identify themselves through the different roles they are playing in different situations and in their relationships with others. In this respect, in my own view that influences my methodological and theoretical approaches, this inclination to emphasise one factor (structure or agency) and neglect the other will not help to explain the process of students' personal growth. Examining students' personal development through the process of paralleling agency and structure is a possibility to depict a more authentic picture of the personal development process; 'authentic' in terms of not just recognising both agential and structural formative powers but also in terms of capturing students' awareness and 'processing' of these different influences.

Yuan et al.'s (2019) small-scale study aims to reveal how the internationalisation of higher education in China impacts on Chinese college students' perceptions of their identity. They interviewed just eight Chinese students involved in 'an internationalised university setting': a BA program in an elite Chinese university in Beijing, which had 'four full-time international staff (out of 30) and over 30 international students' (p.967) and emphasised the importance of students' foreign language proficiency (p.977). The authors claim that these students may be experiencing some identity paradoxes.

A participant identified as S6 in Yuan et al.'s research described Chinese students in his/her university as 'dedicated learners' (p.969) for their strong desire to achieve academic success. Involvement in this internationalised programme, however, made S6 feel 'lost', he/she self-identified as 'a disoriented bee' (p.970). S2 observed that their international classmates did not work as hard as Chinese students, but looked like 'tourists' (*ibid*); Yuan et al. (2019) reported other participants had a similar sense. They could not understand international students' attitudes towards study and complained that courses in this programme were designed to cater to these international students, and were delivered in English. Certain courses were taught twice – one in English for all students and one in Chinese for Chinese students - which they felt made teaching in this programme 'unsystematic'. Yuan et al. (2019) maintain this exerted negative influence on their participants' academic study and hindered them from fulfiling their role as Chinese 'dedicated learners'.

The second paradox of identity reported in their study is a mismatch between being 'global citizens' and 'proud Chinese'. Their participants identified themselves as global citizens because they thought this internationalised programme endowed them with high possibilities or even guarantee of acquiring good English proficiency, intercultural communication abilities and 'an international perspective' (p.971). Meanwhile, closer connection with international students constantly

reminded them of their national identity as 'proud Chinese' (ibid), especially when they observed what they saw as international students' disrespect to their teachers, and stereotyped 'the country's image' (p.972) of China. Thus, Yuan et al. (2019) claim that globalisation and internationalisation in higher education in China brings students to adopt an international perspective, such as an emphasis of 'individuality and uniqueness' (p.972), while also raising an awareness of their national identity and the need to defend their own country's image.

Participants in Yuan et al.'s study (2019) also noted they had to deal with an identity dichotomy between being 'a team player' and 'an independent fighter' (p.973) in cooperative learning with their international classmates. On the one hand, these participants appreciated teamwork with the international students and were happy to work together as team players; on the other hand, they regarded Chinese members as sometimes playing as 'independent fighters' when their international group members were absent from the group meetings. Yuan et al. (2019) argue this phenomenon results from major distinctions in learning habits between Chinese students and students from other countries. They suggest that Chinese students tend to work hard for their academic achievement, while the international students may not.

Yuan et al.'s (2019) interpretations of their findings reveal that their attention is primarily with the influences of cultural and structural forces on students' identity formation, distinguishing 'Chinese' from 'international'. In doing this they are underestimating or even denigrating the role of students' individual reflexivity in guiding them through their life trajectories at the university.

2.4 An investigation of an IBC at the individual student level

As I earlier discussed (see section 1.1), much research in the existing literature on TNHE/IBC focuses on national and institutional levels, but only a handful of studies pay attention to students' experiences within TNHE, in which students' satisfaction (e.g. Ahmad, 2015; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013) and their employment/employability (e.g. Mok & Han, 2016a) seem to merit most attention. An initial but extensive literature search located few examples of research in the field of TNHE concerned with student affairs beyond their employability development.

A case study of an American branch campus established inside a South Korean state-university (Kim, 2014) presented some impressive findings which provoked my research interest. This IBC in South Korea was treated as a 'Third Space', in which South Korean students who engaged with it were seen as 'foreign' in the eyes of their 'Korean' counterparts who did not. Even their own perception of themselves was ambiguous; in other words, those South Korean students participating in that IBC were not clear about their identity as to whether they were Korean students or 'international' students and they even deliberately hid their TNHE-attendance experience from other students (Kim, 2014, 2016). Kim points out that such a phenomenon may result from the homogeneous social and cultural contexts in South Korea and the tendency to value and seek social conformity. I then wondered what the situation in a Chinese IBC might be? Although China and Korea share similar cultural roots, Chinese cultures have been portrayed as shown greater culturally tolerance than Korea (Hsü, 2000). Bearing this in mind, can I expect the attitudes towards Chinese students within IBCs in the Chinese context be different?

On the one hand, it seems to be easier to examine attitudes towards TNHE from the non-participant 'others' such as the authorities and the mass media, from the very large number of reports on TNHE in China. From the perspective of these sources, TNHE is welcomed, in aggregate; Chinese

students participating in TNHE are regarded as those who experience 'international HE at home' (e.g Beijing Morning Post, 2016; Li, 2015; Guo, 2016; Sohu.com, 2015, 2016; MoE, 2013). On the other hand, a literature search suggested little is known about the self-perceptions of the students within TNHE in China. A recent study (Li, 2017) which examines the influence of extra-curricular programmes on citizenship amongst Chinese students within TNHE revealed that the extra-curricular learning in TNHE contributed to shaping self-awareness among Chinese students about understanding themselves and their relationships with society. Although this study partially uncovered students' lived experiences in TNHE in China, an understanding of Chinese students that encompasses and integrates more aspects of their life, - and their perceptions of who they will become interested me in particular - within TNHE in China is still waiting to be explored.

2.5 Summary

In this chapter, I justified taking an integrated approach to studying college student identity formation. This idea inspires me to employ and hybridize habitus and reflexivity as two major thinking tools to guide my research and the analysis of my findings, and stops me from turning to an extreme emphasis of either the power of individual agency or the decisive role of external structures as some research has done in the investigation of college student identity formation. Although habitus and reflexivity seem to be often treated as a pair of opposing ideas – one illustrates how society 'decides' individuals' action while the other endows individuals with agential power to free them from external forces – it is possible to employ them in an integrated way by having reflexive habitus or habitual reflexivity as I earlier discussed in this chapter.

The idea of the 'anticipation of identity' as another thinking tool also helps me understand and explain how my participants develop themselves in TU. One's previous experiences and dispositions will not vanish when one enters

a new stage in life; instead, they will continue to exert influences on individuals' personal development.

CHAPTER III. Methodology — My Research Trajectory

David Silverman (2000) encourages apprentice researchers to write about their research history, including their 'ups and downs' and 'trials and errors' (p.236) in the methodology chapter. Taking his suggestion, in this chapter, I have shared my four-year academic trajectory with my audience by presenting both troubles and confusion as well as sparkles and inspiration I encountered as an ordinary doctoral candidate in this specific phase. Hopefully, my sharing would play a positively inductive part in helping future apprentice researchers to put forward their own ideas.

3.1 My research questions and research aim

I ask two research questions when carrying out this research:
1) What do these Chinese undergraduate students at TU perceive their identities to be?
2) How do they form their identity?

I finalised my current research objective and questions at the end of the first year of my doctoral study. Initially, I intended to examine student employability and employment after graduating from TU; I assumed that what Chinese students most cared about might be their future career aspirations after investing a large amount of money in their education at TU. Because hundreds of thousands of research reports can be found by including a keyword 'employ' in a search (see ERIC) and news of TU and other transnational higher education institutions in China is permeated with a tale of their alumni's successful career or entrepreneurial stories (e.g. Liu, 2018; Duke-Kunshan University, 2018; TU news on its homepage), it seemed that employment/employability might be the most significance concern to the public and academia. Then, I focused on reading literature on student employment/employability, designing research questions and

starting to pilot several interviews. At that time, I urged myself to find answers to my research questions and complete my thesis.

In pilot interviews with non-participants of my main research, I found employment/employability was merely a small part of these interviewees' lives rather than the most significant aspect. Expecting or being expected by their family to end up getting a decent job with a TU degree, they came to TU. However, they cared about a wide range of 'larger' things apart from their future jobs, notably including their personal self-development, TU's development and Chinese educational reform. They expected to see what changes would happen to them over the four years in this particular learning environment. My view of my position as an educational researcher is that I should authentically report on what is meaningful to my students, rather than meet the needs of the academic market. Enhancing college students' employability and giving employment guarantees are truly important for universities and students, but it is not the end of the story for these young people entering university. I then started to consider shifting the balance of the external expectations of universities and students at least a little towards the internal world of the students themselves.

Some junior undergraduates I met when participating in various activities solidified my doubt over whether they were coming to TU merely to enhance their future employment prospects. Many college students might be misunderstood and even reduced to be the ideal-type utilitarian. Although on the university website there are many stories of the successful graduates of TU, who are set up as role models and regarded as the 'pride' of this university, these students I met did not want to become one 'model'. On ethical grounds, they must be regarded as individuals rather than a 'model' produced and advertised by this university's marketing apparatus. These students I met had faith in themselves and enthusiasm for the future of Chinese society and their contribution to improving it. At that time my intended target participants were TU graduates and senior students, not those I met in various student activities in my own life as a student. I had

joined in with this latter group simply because of our shared interests in particular activities and clubs, such as the women's entrepreneur group, the theatre club (not for acting but watching) and a devotional group. Several of these students, finally, contributed to my research, as explained in the Sampling section (3.3.4).

With my supervisor's encouragement and support, I re-designed my research, recruited my research participants and re-organised my agenda. I felt inspired through working with these students and it made me better understand life in TU and better understand these young people. Then, I found my research did not merely aim to give these students' opportunities; it also provided me with such an opportunity to express myself. This thesis is not merely a report of my students' growth, but also records my own growing pains. I cannot be sure to what extent my research may facilitate educational work in TNHE in China, but this four-year trajectory has had a deep influence on my life. The major stakeholder of a doctoral study is the researcher him/herself, although there may be few researchers who realise it.

In the current research, a total of 45 Chinese undergraduate students studying in a Sino-British cooperative university (TU) in different stages of their study volunteered to participate, which examined their personal development processes in their life trajectories at TU. I intend to provide these students with opportunities to speak for themselves rather than point out what goes wrong in this particular phase at TU or investigate potential problems in their personal growth processes and attempt to solve them for these students, as if from a 'God's-eye view'. As one of my participants (Yue, M, Yr1) said 'those who people can see are always the voiced students, but the voiceless are waiting to be noticed.' My students would like to share their lived experiences at TU through my research.

Although suggestions have been made in the conclusion drawn from these students' self-reflective narratives, these students were never regarded as

the source material of potential problems in the first place and I did not deliberately focus on seeking problems from and judging their life trajectories. My research aims to illustrate and interpret the phenomena of these students at TU and to call for space, patience and more options for each individual's growth, just because these students are real persons, aspiring to make their choices and go forward to their ideal life. I hope more Chinese students will be encouraged to design their lives and stay with their dreams because being different and living a different life may constitute the younger generation in the contemporary world but does not constitute a 'problem' to be solved.

3.1.1 My biography and the research

In the book *Our studies, Ourselves* edited by Glassner and Hertz (2003), 22 social researchers share their narratives and assert that their personal lives do matter in their research. Their sharing resonates with my experiences when carrying out this research. I noticed that my biography had assisted to shape my work. Lumsden (2012) even vividly describes this relationship between the researcher and the research, 'you are what you are researching' (p.3).

Gans, the eighth teller in Glassener and Hertz's book (2003), is devoted to investigating American antipoverty work. His personal background, coming from a poor family, exerts considerable influence on his research interest and the conduct of his research, and much of the success in his research can be attributed to this background. Gans explains that 'a neighbourhood effect' (2003, p.91) may pull him and his subjects closer. The neighbourhood effect occurred in my research, helping me to establish rapport with my students. Many interviewed students were willing to share their feelings and experiences with me; several often consulted me over their concerns about their lives at TU. The possible reasons are twofold. The first reason is pertinent to my personality. I am an empathetic listener for my students

and a trustworthy 'elder sister learner' (*xuejie* 学姐)[11], with some living experiences at TU to talk to. As one participant, Ning (F, Yr1) noted,

> The reason I came here to attend your research interview is that I need to talk to someone older. I am lost in this university. I guess many Yr1 students joined for the same reason as me.

Wang (M, Yr1) and Yue (M, Yr1) both expressed their feelings of being marginalised or finding it hard to join in with their peers at TU for a similar reason that neither came from a well-off family as many of their peers did; they required my advice. I was empathetic towards this sense of being marginalised because I had a similar family background to theirs, but now I have found my position in this university and have friends sharing my hobbies and values. I encouraged both of them to explore their hobbies and look for their own friends with an open mind. I was delighted to know that they had both become accustomed to the environment at TU, months later in the follow-up interviews. Yue (M, Yr1) expressed his 'sense of belonging' in TU, which even surprised himself. But his changes were not beyond my hopes and expectations because university is and should be a place where students can explore and transform themselves for the better (Marginson,

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[11] My participants called me *xuejie* (elder sister learner). The terms such as 'sister 姐妹', 'aunt 阿姨 and 'uncle 叔叔' are commonly used in Chinese society including college students' communities, to call people even strangers instead of calling them simply by their surnames or full names. This is probably because Chinese society is 'a society without strangers, a society based totally on the familiar' (熟人社会 *shuren shehui,* coined by Fei, Hisao-tung, 1992 [translated by Hamilton, G. G. & Wang, Z., first published in 1947], p.41). Chinese people tend to distinguish *zijiaren (*自家人) (my own people), which may include anyone whom you want to drag into your own circle, and you use it to indicate your intimacy with them.' (*ibid*, p.62). The remaining people outside one's circle are simultaneously labelled as *wairen* (外人) (other people). Contemporary Chinese scholars (e.g. Wei, 2013; Xia & Liu, 2011; Zhai, 2017) assert that even nowadays this foundation in forming Chinese society is long lasting in China and embedded in Chinese minds. This assumption is very likely to explain some Chinese distinctive norms, e.g., *guanxi*. And traditionally Chinese people are not used to saying 'thank you' to each other, because 'We know each other very well (*shuren*). If you need my help, you have it.' (Fei, 1992[1947], p. 42). The features of such a Chinese society described in Chinese scholars appear in the communities composed of Chinese students at TU, to some extent. For example, my students called me 'elder sister learners' or 'elder sister' rather than my name or in other ways.

2014). Conversations with them inspired me to try some loosely-structured interviews because with such an approach, students would have the flexibility to talk of anything related to their life trajectories rather than merely addressing my interview questions as an assignment.

Secondly, my previous working and learning experiences helped to form a bridge between me and my students. I can sense tension and confusion in their academic and non-academic lives partly because of my familiarity as an insider of an IBC with its surroundings and partly because of my professional sensibility as a former high school teacher in China. This makes it easier for me to understand what my participants would be likely to confront in the transition from being Chinese high school students to becoming college students in TU. I also have some knowledge of the expected 'learning disposition' in a British university because I completed my master's degree in the UK. In this respect, my students were willing to swap ideas with me about their worries regarding, for example, their adaptation to the exchange period in the UK campus in their third year of study, their internship and future career, even their romantic relationships and relationships with their parents. I felt these students trusted me because of our exchange of similar troubles we had encountered and feelings we had experienced. My doctoral research also placed great expectations on them because they were interested in it and eager to share their stories with the outsiders.

Sherryl Kleinman, the eighteenth teller in Glassener and Hertz's (2003) book, depicts how a feminist researcher's sensitivity helps her discover 'small acts' (p.338) and has significant impacts on her work. My case is consistent with hers. As a female researcher, I also felt it was easy for me to capture my students' emotional changes and give timely and sympathetic feedback to them. And quite probably a female researcher would seldom form a source of potential ethical harassment to the participants, both female and male. Additionally, as a former female high school teacher, I have been trained and have developed my own approach to getting along

well with young people by showing my patience and respect for them and thinking from their perspectives. My previous working experience has also shaped my strong sense of responsibility as a teacher to help my students' out if I found they were in trouble.

To be honest, at first, I thought an age-gap of over ten years between me and these participants in my research might constitute a 'generation gap' and hinder our communication, but our conversations were actually conducted very smoothly. This 'age gap', instead, has brought me benefits in building up rapport with them because my students regarded me as a good counsellor in both learning and living at TU. Meanwhile, I am (from their eyes) something of a 'perfect listener', distant from their living circles, with less hazard of giving away their sharing by accident to our common acquaintances: because I have no connection with their friends and teachers their 'secrets' are safe with me. In the interview, when they needed my comments, I would talk; if not, I just listened. The relaxed atmosphere in our conversations was very helpful for a qualitative study of students' life trajectories. In a word, many male and female students in my research were relaxed and open to this older female and feminist researcher. This provided me with rich information about these students and strengthened my determination to retain the original meanings of these respondents and the significance to them in their life trajectories.

3.2 The researcher

3.2.1 As a liminal being

In this research, I experienced a transitional process from misunderstanding to being inspired by these students and from a total outsider to being a 'partial' insider of TU. I call myself a 'partial' insider to these Chinese students, because I do not have an undergraduate degree from TU. Although I spent over three years together with my students at the same campus, what I experienced and conceived as a postgraduate student in an IBC are

not the same as their experiences. That is one reason why my research may not be defined as an ethnography. Even though I could participate in many activities with these students, I could not become 'one of them' nor speak for them. What I could do is provide these students with an opportunity to speak for themselves, even though that would be 'through me', which has implications for my position and role that I have addressed. In this respect, I would define my role as a 'liminal being', a concept developed by Victor Turner (1969). I borrow it to illustrate my relationship with these students in my research. Turner (1969) depicted 'liminal beings' as 'neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony' (p.95). Wels et al. (2011) explain this position as 'a transitional phase' (p.2), when people are 'no longer' their prior selves but have 'not yet' transferred to their new roles (*ibid*).

In my case, I am no longer a TU outsider, but I have not yet become a full insider. This transitional position brings me certain advantages. On the one hand, starting as an outsider, I have had an appreciation of the questions and worries on the situation of Chinese TNHEI/IBC expressed by the outsiders. For example, the Chinese public appear to be primarily concerned with the teaching quality and academic achievements, which are one of the most frequent searching queries about TNHEI/IBC online. Some Chinese scholars worry TNHE in China will act to influence or undermine the values of Chinese domestic cultures (Li & Jiang, 2005; Shen, 2017; Song, 2017). My students' accounts can address these questions to some extent. On the other hand, as an observer inside an IBC, by witnessing and experiencing lives at TU, I can better understand and reveal what is happening inside rather than merely repeat the information posted on TU websites and parroted by the mass media to the outsiders.

3.2.2 My subjectivity and the research

The 'advantages' of my liminality and sensitivity, however, come with a warning over the researchers' subjectivity which may 'contaminate' the

research objectivity and be seen as 'problematic' and 'biased'. But in social science research, absolute objectivity seems infeasible, as Hammersley (2011) discusses, researchers' epistemological stances will inevitably affect their research. Political researchers, in particular, even 'take sides' in their research, as Lumsden (2017, p.3) notes. Sullivan (2002) asserts that her research has become her life, and she cannot stand 'objectively' aside from her life. My emotional and psychological transitions are similar to hers. In my case, my doctoral research has been no longer a mission to be conquered but an irreproducible phase of my trajectory in my adulthood, which is as meaningful as other phases of my life. My student participants' lives at TU made me nostalgic for my old school days; their trajectories may also resonate with those of the audience of this report to some extent. I hope this will help to make my thesis more readable; and my writing is meant to be read.

Even as an adult, I am evolving along with these students. I find I have changed in my attitudes towards this work, from rushing to complete it to accepting it as part of my life to be 'lived' and appreciated as much as any other parts in my life. My changes are attributable to these students' interest in my research and their kindness and trust in me. As a researcher, a neutral stance should not be dismissed; but as a mature student, I have a strong sense of obligation to give my hand when these students turned to me. Social research is a part of the society in which it is conducted; the researcher should not act as an observer or a recorder merely to watch what is happening and focus on the data (Zhai, 2017). Furthermore, my purpose in doing this research is not confined to accomplishing this 'task' or polishing my resume but extends to advising and enlightening current and future Chinese students in similar contexts, which has become a major meaning in the doctoral study phase of my life. Some of my students did more than just attend my interviews and present their thoughts; they showed their concerns about TU and updated their constructive advice on campus improvement. In this respect, both my students and I are likely to make subjective contributions to in this research.

Many researchers try to suggest how to achieve objective research outcomes in face of researchers' subjectivity. Letherby (2013) suggests an ideal position for researchers to be 'theorised subjectivity' (p. 79), which

> acknowledges that research is a subjective, power-laden, emotional, embodied experience but does not see this as a disadvantage….; [r]ather it requires the constant, critical interrogation of our personhood—both intellectual and personal—within the knowledge production process. (p.80)

Scott (2013) warns that researchers' subjectivity does not imply that social researchers can only examine those 'who are like themselves' (p. 100); otherwise, for example, criminals could only be studied by criminals (*ibid*). He therefore claims that the researchers' subjectivity is feeling awareness and having sensibility.

Keeping these warnings in mind, in my meetings with these students, I gave advice to some students when I felt they panicked about something happening around them which I had happened to have experienced before. I carefully worded my advice and never judged their accounts, which has been discussed in the later section (3.7). It might be thought of as data contamination, but for participant-researchers, it is impossible to stand completely neutrally away from the participants' life. In my case, if I was not the one whom they could turn to, there must be others who could help. If they failed to turn to anyone, the situation they confront might become even worse. As a mature student, I could not just look on bad things happening to my participants. If my words were to be influential in their future life, I would be glad to see that; because in my opinion, being helpful to students was the way I expected to realise my research values.

3.3 Research design

Research designing depends on the research purpose (Cohen et al., 2017). As I discussed in an earlier section (3.1) my research focuses on meanings with regard to these students' knowledge and reflections on what is happening in their lives at TU, rather than statistics. My participants would tell their stories, as individuals who may have unique likes and dislikes, particular personalities or principles in making friends. In this respect, I determined to employ a qualitative approach for my research. Before conducting it, the following constraints vital to the feasibility of the research had been carefully taken into consideration: time and energy, policies at TU and research instruments I could access.

Time and energy constraints are the first influential factors. Social science doctoral students are generally expected to complete the research within 36 months. Given this time constraint, a cross-sectional study was considered more feasible than a longitudinal one. I had clearly realised that within the time and energy constraints, it was impracticable to trace my targeted students for two or more years. Although this constituted a key research limitation – which has been discussed more generally later (see section 7.3) - a generalisation of Chinese students' development or depiction of a 'typical' student was not what I was aiming for, because any single individual cannot be represented in a meaningful way by another individual, which has been justified repeatedly in this thesis.

According to the ethical policies of TU, I was not allowed to send an invitation email to all students. Thus, recruiting random samples was impossible for my research. In this respect, I finally had recruited 'non-probability samples' mainly through two ways: sending an invitation email to Yr1 students and snow-balling (see section 3.5.3).

In-depth interviews were decided as the major data collection method in this qualitative research. An in-depth interview means deep emotions and

insights, rooted in rapport and trustworthiness between the researcher and the participants. As I justified my relationships with my research and the participants in the previous sections (cf. section 3.1), most participants had in-depth talks with me about their academic and non-academic lives at TU in the interviews (see section 3.5). Short questionnaires were also employed as an icebreaker to initiate the interviews and as a straightforward tool to collect their basic demographic information in my research. Observation was another method I employed; but observation data were mainly used to facilitate my understanding of the participants and the TU conditions.

Cohen et al. (2017), however, remind apprentice researchers that 'it is dangerous to put absolute faith in [the plan]' (p.237). Moreover, Verma and Mallick (1999) maintain that conducting research is such a spiral process, rather than a linear one, that researchers should prepare for (re)adaptation to any emergency. In my case, I made some changes to meet the requirements of the respondents and emergent events when I was conducting the research. For example, as initially planned, I would conduct two rounds of interviews, in the 2017 and 2018 Autumn Semesters separately. In reality, the increasing academic pressure and tight schedules of most of my students along with the ethical concerns discouraged a second round of interviews, although most of them had expressed their willingness to attend the follow-up meetings. I actually contacted each participant who promised the attendance twice for their availability but failed to appropriately schedule another meeting with every participant because they were occupied with other commitments. Given the ethical concerns, I stopped contacting them in order not to make them feel being nagged or distracted. Finally, 7 participants volunteered to attend the follow-up interviews. Although I encountered participants drop-out, most participants provided in-depth information in the first interviews which guaranteed my gaining rich insights from them (Figure 3.1 My interview schedule).

Figure 3.1 My interview schedule

3.3.1 The adoption of a qualitative study

My research was carried out in a qualitative paradigm because firstly qualitative research is more suitable in researching human behaviour and insights, and the multi-layered social and cultural connections within them (Cohen et al., 2017). Secondly qualitative research concentrates on 'unstructured data' rather than 'statistical forms' (Hammersley, 2013, p.7) and investigates the meanings and ideas the participant delivers rather than stopping at the moment the data are yielded. As McCracken notes (1988, p.16 cited in Skyrme & While, 2011, p.189), going to university brings students to engage in personal reconstruction in multiple aspects, not limited to their 'behaviour in classrooms or in respect to classrooms and teachers' (*ibid*), but in their choices of, for example, 'leisure activities, personal relationships, time management' – the choices 'potentially impact on every aspect of one's life and sense of who one is' (*ibid*). A qualitative paradigm provides the hope to capture the details of students' reconstruction in this HE institutions.

Additionally, qualitative research suits the study of 'a small number of cases' (Hammersley, 2013, p.7). My research drew on a small number of interview accounts (45), although, more often, identity studies are based on a large sample and aim to provide a generalised result for the population as a whole (e.g. Bowman & Felix, 2017; Murray & Kennedy-Lightsey, 2013; Kleine et al., 2017). I defend the validity of small-scale qualitative data in identity studies. Firstly, the alleged 'representative sample' in quantitative research

will not naturally represent the phenomena of the whole population just because of a large sample size or 'randomisation' (López et al., 2015, p.106) in sample selection. Even if the sample size (e.g. 449 samples in Bowman & Felix's research, 2017; 1282 samples in Kleine et al., 2017) is much larger than that in a qualitative study, I suspect no one can ensure these samples can rightly represent the development of the whole targeted population. Moreover, quantitative data may not guarantee a completely generalisable result, as Zhai (2017) argues that any quantitative research cannot thoroughly be free from the researcher's subjectivity. He then suggests that at least the findings of a qualitative study with small-scale sample will uncover some authentic phenomena of a small number of individuals from a wider population, even though they are not 'representative' of that population (*ibid*). Secondly, conventional identity research in large scale form usually tends to pre-design a certain classical identity formation mode (for example, Eric Erikson's, 1996[1950]); findings from such research actually illustrate information that embodies the researchers' predictions of what the respondents are going to become and which events are significant to them (Haußer, 1983, p.177, cited in Kraus, 2000, p.2). In this respect, the key to identity study does not fully depend on how large the research sample is.

In a qualitative approach, my students are regarded as evolving individuals in the first place; their identity formation, at least, what I am looking for in my research, is a process, - reflecting in these students' lived experiences, memories, knowledge, perception and emotions, etc. -, not a more-or-less state. They will not be categorised into a certain identity formation mode because subtle differences emerging in each individual's personal development are problematic to be thoroughly and rigorously absorbed in a generalised and completed mode. Literally, only an evolving model can examine these evolving students.

The intention of my research does not provide a generalised result for the population of Chinese undergraduate students at TU or even in any

TNHEI/IBC in China as a whole. Rather, this qualitative study reveals my students' self-reports of 'who they think they are' rather than 'who they are' in the researcher's eyes, by employing a third-person narrative method to let them tell their own stories.

3.3.2 Data collection instruments

Interviews and observation are two major methods employed in my research. As I discussed (see section 1.2.1), one's self/identity, or the answer to the question 'Who am I?' is embedded in individuals' words and behaviours. Since social science researchers cannot investigate individuals' identity formation by reading individuals' minds directly, listening to their words and observing their actions are the tools researchers can reply on, and the use of these will always involve interpretation of the words and actions.

Interviews

An interview is a useful research tool to enable my students to express their opinions on what is happening around them and discuss what moments are significant to them. Cohen et al. (2017) remark that interviews are 'human embedded' (p.657), while Walford (2001) argues that an interview should be considered as a conversation not merely a tool for data collection. However, Dyer (1995, p.56) reminds us that an interview is not exactly the same as 'an everyday conversation' because an interview is purpose-oriented and question-based and needs researchers' control and organisation to accomplish the research purpose (Dyer, 1995). All the characteristics of interviews in the literature should be borne in the researcher's mind when conducting each interview.

Additionally, Cicourel (1964, cited in Cohen et al., 2017, p.658) concludes a number of key factors contributing to a successful interview, including the relationships between the interviewer and the interviewees, and the interviewer's wording and skills of control during the interviews. Although

all my interviews followed the same interview protocol, every interview was different, simply because every interviewee is unique. Some participants are humorous and liked to make jokes in the interview; some are fragile and sensitive and came to me for consultation to some extent. Thus, careful wording and other methodological and mental readjustment to different responses of the participants during the interview needed my extreme concentration. Although the interview process was tiring, that was the favourite part in my entire research because listening to their stories and swapping ideas with them were enjoyable.

Three types of interviews, namely, loosely-structured narrative interviews, WeChat interviews and the follow-up interviews are elaborated in the following sections.

- Loosely-structured narrative interviews

Since the participants vary, the key feature of flexibility of loosely-structured interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Cohen et al., 2017) would be necessary when collecting data in my research. Also, compared with factual interviews which concentrate on obtaining precise information for professional purposes, as policemen or doctors do for their investigative work (Brinkmann & Kavle, 2018), narrative interviews aiming to invite interviewees to share their detailed anecdotes and their perspectives and views (*ibid*), would properly serve my research objectives.

There seems, however, no such term 'loosely-structured' in the research guidebooks I am learning from when conducting my research (e.g. Brinkamann & Kvales, 2018; Cohen et al., 2017; Ilyushin & Azbel, 2017; Punch & Oancea, 2014; Silverman, 2013; Wood et al., 2016), but a term 'semi-structured' (sorted by Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, cited in Cohen et al., 2017, p.413) to indicate an interview format which is neither fully structured nor fully unstructured. While I prefer 'loosely' structured to depict my interviews format because firstly my interviews are structured as each was guided by my interview guideline (see Appendix II) to guarantee the focus

on my research objective; secondly, the structure of all the interviews structure is loose in light of a requirement of the in-depth interview to engage in deep discussion about the participants' insights, views and much 'non-standardised and personalised information' (Cohen et al., 2017, p.662). Thus, my interviews were intended to be carried out in a flexible way, in which follow-up questions to the participants' responses were necessary (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse, 2012). In this respect, my interviews were structured loosely to leave flexibility for both the researcher and the participants. To conduct high quality loosely-structured interviews, piloting was cautiously carried out before formal data collection began (see section 3.6.1).

- <u>WeChat-interviews</u>

Eleven interviews were conducted via a digital communicative tool, WeChat[12] in my research. Conventionally, interview data are expected to be collected through physical, face-to-face meetings; otherwise, it seems not to be an 'interview' because of a lack of opportunities to communicate smoothly or establish real connections between the interviewer and the interviewees, as Arksey and Knight (1999) remark. For this reason, interviews through other media such as telephone or other on-line chatting software seem to be discouraged, even if they have some strengths, such as economy and convenience, and may be better at protecting interviewees' privacy without a face-to-face meeting (Cohen et al., 2017).

In the contemporary digital world, however, 'meeting' is not restricted to being physically face-to-face. People can 'meet' on the Internet through various communication appliances, online and off-line, which have become part of people's social life (James & Busher, 2012). Interviews can be conducted via these digital media without worries over a lack of positive communication. Online communication modes are diverse. Via online communicative media, apart from text messages, audio and video messages

[12] WeChat (Wikipedia): WeChat is a Chinese multi-purpose messaging, social media and mobile payment app.

can be used in the communication, together with icons and stickers to express emotions. Thus, interviewing via online media can collect information as rich as that from the conventional interviews.

In my research, most of my participants decided to meet me face–to-face. Eleven participants suggested WeChat interviews for two main reasons. Participant Shi (F, Yr1) preferred to talk to a stranger – the researcher-online, and this was a good way to protect the respondent's 'anonymity' (Cohen et al., 2017, p.705). The remaining ten WeChat interviews, including two follow-up interviews, were conducted mainly because of the infeasibility of a face-to-face interview: every time I fixed an appropriate date with these students, they were either not on the campus or occupied with other commitments. All these online interviews were conducted following the ethical rules. The consent form was sent to each of them via WeChat and e-signatures were collected before each online interview started.

WeChat interviews through text or audio messages could save the researcher's time in recording the conversation because our conversations would be recorded in this communicative application automatically. It, however, made the interview longer because the researcher and the student both needed to wait for the other part's message and then send his or her response back. Three WeChat interviews were conducted through audio talk, which were more convenient and economical. But the researcher needed to consider the availability of the Wi-Fi signal and the audio-recording. The researcher's preparation has been discussed in detail in the section on data collection procedure.

- <u>Follow-up interviews</u>

I initially planned to invite each participant to attend a second-round interview and had asked for their permission at the end of each interview. The time constraints of both the researcher and the respondents, however, made this proposal infeasible. Finally, seven volunteers, including two first year male students, two third year (one female and male) and three fourth

year (one female and two male) offered to have follow-up conversations with me, a semester after they were first interviewed. When the follow-up interviews were conducted, I was not a complete stranger to these students because we had kept contact, mostly via WeChat; sometimes, they consulted me with their academic and life issues. A rapport had been established between the researcher and the students; also, they had gained knowledge about what I was doing.

The follow-up interviews were unstructured. The seven participants were invited to talk about anything they wished to share without my intervention. These follow-up interviews brought more retrospective data and enriched my research findings. These participants even kindly suggested and encouraged me. They opened a new world to me, which was different from the one I had observed from my perspective.

In the follow-up interviews, two students asked to look through their first interview transcripts and gave feedback on the views they had held before. One expressed her shock by saying 'Was that me at that time?' This student (Jia, Yr4, F) told me she thought she had become stronger than ever before. She had changed from a little girl who was afraid of growing up and wanted to escape from reality to live a pastoral life, to a responsible young lady who cared about health issues among ordinary people in society. I could see the continuous development in them; their words continued inspiring my work and my life trajectory. As a researcher, I was glad that their accounts supported my research. As the 'elder sister learner', I felt happy for them, especially to see the growth of those who had struggled much in our first meetings.

Observation

- The overt observation

I had conducted some 'overt observation' mainly in two events - a weekly English practice with some Yr1 students and in the devotional meetings with

a number of students from different stages of study at TU. All participants in both activities knew my role as a doctoral researcher and my research objectives. Some participants had been invited to attend my interviews before, and some joined in my research later. My participation was partly due to my own interest and partly motivated by an intention to access Chinese undergraduate students who might be potential participants for my research. During those activities I took part in, my role oscillated between being a participant and an observer; but in both the workshops and the meetings, since I was aware of the ethical issues, I did not take any recording during each participation.

The overt participation was a prerequisite in forming my role as a liminal being here (see section 3.2.1), shrank the distance between me and the 'post-90s' generation of students and allowed me to make friends with some of them. While I regarded myself as a complete outsider to these young people, when I first came to TU in September 2016, participating in these activities provided me with possibilities to contact students and build up rapport with some of them; I even invited some I met in these activities to participate in my interviews. Only with their permission did I contact them as potential interviewees a year later when I started to collect data.

- My routine observation activity

Engaged at TU, I am automatically observing my surroundings, including some of my participants' lives unavoidably, every day. This observation as my routine activity is inevitable and constitutes my role as a researcher and part of my life trajectory at TU. This observation activity occurs almost everywhere at campus, such as on the way from my dorm to the campus, or in various academic and non-academic activities, as I come across them. My daily observation can capture students' 'unaffected' behaviours because these behaviours are not their acting when noticing I am observing them[13].

[13] People may tend to change their behaviour and performance they think the observer may expect to see when they realise the existence of the observer. This phenomenon is called the 'Hawthorne effect' (see El-Saed et al., 2018; McCambridge et al., 2013).

Such observation has facilitated my adjustment to the TU context as well as my gradual understanding of the 'Chinese post-90s generation' and removal of my biased impression of them, formed by the influence of many items published in the mass media.

Apart from the daily observation, in order to comprehend Chinese students' formal performance in the classroom at TU, I deliberately attended public lectures and workshops, which were always crowded with Yr1 students (2017 Entry) because their attendance was compulsory. Most of my participants informed me of their experiences and reactions in the classroom; only by attending their courses could I get partial access to their academic life and piece together their accounts of what had happened in their classroom, and make a relatively objective interpretation of their academic experiences. Given the potential risk for a covert researcher and research ethics considerations, I did not take any 'secret' video or audio recordings during the class or take notes of their behaviour and words in the classroom, but only observed, listened and reflected. I did not know anyone's personal information details. Besides, in order to protect their privacy, I did not recruit any of these students as my research participants. Given ethical concerns about observation, I did not record them and nor do I present my covert observations in my research. It constitutes a part of background information together with what has been posted on TU's web site and news about TU, to assist me in getting a better understanding of TU as well as TU participants.

Briefly, I did not take recordings or notes in my observation. My observation was mainly employed as supporting information for me to develop my role as a participant researcher, understand more about these students' life and attitudes and ground my interview design. It also contributed to forming my epistemological stance in the research: I insist on returning the utterance rights to my students and letting them speak for themselves because they deserve a better understanding by outsiders of TU. My entire research was inspired and influenced by the idea of taking a grounded theory approach,

though I did not explicitly adopt it. In other words, because of the complexity of my research subjects' (as human beings) personal development process, my thesis is not a report to describe and justify how I successfully fitted data provided by my participants into certain normative models studying college students' identity development, but a process of how I recognised an approach to describing and interpreting my students' identity development process. My observation mostly occurred before I started to carry out collecting interview data and was loosely structured; the only focus was things happening to them inside and outside of classrooms.

3.3.3 Research ethics

Ethical concerns must strictly pervade the whole research from the research design, during data collection, to the dissemination of the research report (Atkins & Wallace, 2013; Bell, 1999; Cohen et al., 2017; Galletta, 2013). Although researchers may think that possible ethical problems have been anticipated before conducting research according to the ethical guidelines, Cohen et al. (2017) remind novice researchers in particular, that forethought and carefulness are never too much and capacities to handle unexpected ethical problems emerging during the research are necessary. Atkins and Wallace (2013) also advise that ethical guidelines should not be applied literally and instrumentally. While Bell (1999) suggests listing the ethical guarantees and fulfilling them one by one in the whole research. Based on these experiences and instructions, the implications of ethical guidelines in my research developed by the institution I am involved in and BERA (2011) are found as follows.

Ethics documents

Required ethics documents including the participant consent form, the participants information sheet and the '*Research Ethics Checklist for Staff and Research Students*' were all checked carefully, signed by my supervisor and me and inspected strictly by the ethics committee of the Graduate

School (GS) the researcher is involved in and endorsed by GS, to ensure no harm would be caused to any of the participants. The former two forms involve full information of my research objectives, my competence of handling the data based on ethical guidelines, each participant's voluntary participation and full comprehension (Cohen et al., 2017). Printed copies of the two forms were well prepared before beginning data collection. Each participant was invited to read the forms thoroughly and voluntarily signed them. Given that the English language used in the two forms might not be fully accessible to all my participants, the forms were prepared in both English and Chinese to ensure full comprehension of every participant's rights and welfare in my research.

Ethical dilemma and formative solutions

The key ethical dilemma in the implications of ethical guidelines is how the researcher achieves reconciliation between her aspiration to pursue the truth and the participants' autonomy and welfare that may be harmed in the process of the pursuit of truth (Atkins & Wallace, 2013; Cohen et al., 2017). In this respect, participants' voluntarism is essential. They firstly should be thoroughly aware of their 'right to privacy' (Cohen et al., 2017, p.60) and a possibility that their personal stories will be turned into public documents. In my case, all participants are self-selected; they have fully comprehended the purpose of my research and agreed with my intention to get their stories published publicly in papers in the future and read by a wider audience. Sample interview transcripts and copies of their life stories have been anonymously placed in the appendices with their permission.

Apart from guaranteeing participants' voluntarism, three formative solutions (see Bell, 1999; Cohen et al., 2017) to ethical dilemma in my research are found as follows.

- *Participants' privacy protection*

To maximise each participant's privacy protection, their names are anonymised and any information that might identify them has been deleted from the quotes in my thesis. Each participant is given a Chinese surname as a pseudonym that has no link with their real name, characteristics and other personal features to ensure all my students cannot be identified even by a reader from TU, from the total population of approximately 8,000 current students at TU (see TU website, 2020).

Every interview was conducted in a public place, such as an unoccupied classroom or the atrium of the teaching building at a proper time (usually at noon or between 5 to 9 pm). My audio-recorders were not big or noticeable to attract much attention from others. In this respect, although we had conversations in public places, the participants' privacy was not at risk of being exposed to other persons who were passing. Nevertheless, Cohen et al. (2017) warn researchers that no matter what forethoughts of protecting participants' privacy have been borne on the whole research, there is no full privacy in the face-to-face interviews unless there is no physical connection between the researcher and the participants. Thus, ethical and moral consciousness in the researcher is strongly required during the whole research (*ibid*). It is worth mentioning that one participant in my research enquired about the possibility of an on-line interview in the consideration of protecting her privacy by avoiding a face-to-face meeting. Her requirement was fully respected and accepted according to the participants' welfare first principle in research ethics.

- *Data confidentiality*

Researchers must obey the rule of data confidentiality (Atkins & Wallace, 2013; Bell, 1999; Cohen et al., 2017). All interview data have been saved safely in my password-protected personal computer and are exclusively kept for research use only. Additionally, I am the only person accessing the participants' personal information, including their audio-recordings. All

interviews were transcribed by the researcher herself word by word to ensure no possibility of recognition of any of the participant by others through their voices. The researcher never talked with others about any participant's personal information. For academic purpose only, several full transcripts with participants' pseudonyms were translated and submitted to my supervisor for his critical comments and suggestions on analysing the interview data. No personal information was revealed.

- *Researcher's honesty*

Researcher honesty is helpful to develop rapport with the participants. Building rapport in the whole interview process is essential (Duncombe & Jessop, 2012). Without rapport with the participants, researchers can hardly gain in-depth information. Contradictorily, Birch and Miller (2000) point to the fact that it seems impossible for qualitative researchers to separate neatly 'rapport', 'friendship' and 'intimacy' (Duncombe & Jessop, 2012, p.112) and deeper rapport may let some interviewees' regard the interview as a 'therapeutic opportunity' (Birch & Miller, 2000, p.189). Drawing on these authors' reminders, in my case, I was determined to be honest to my participants, never exaggerating the welfare support they would obtain from their participation in my research nor by 'faking friendship' (Duncombe & Jessop, 2012, p.108) with them. I told all my participants honestly about the objectives of my research, the purpose of inviting them, as well as their welfare that I would be happy and ready to help them if they consulted me about their academic and non-academic problems, to ensure every participant's voluntarism in my research. Several students have built up real friendship with me and we keep contact after the interviews.

Power relationship is another ethical concern (Bell, 1999). Researchers with a higher position in any sort of social hierarchy may gain information through power relationships with their participants rather than participants' voluntarism. Some Yr1 participants regarded me, the doctoral student, as a senior student with some 'power' similar to a teacher. Then, their

nervousness and care in choosing wordings and showing me respect was noticeable. They tried to answer my interview questions properly and correctly, but these questions aimed to open our conversations and shrink the gap between us. In this respect, although I was honest to my students that I did not have many priorities over them as a doctoral student, other than being older and with a bit more academic experience than undergraduate students, some of Yr1 participants were still rather too reserved to chat with the strange researcher. Thus, seven interviews, all with Yr1 participants, are short, only lasting a little over 30 minutes.

By contrast, Yr2 to Yr4 students' attitudes towards me, the senior student, and my research were opposite. Perhaps, most of them had had some experiences of participating in research organised by their tutors, or perhaps their greater familiarity with the atmosphere at TU (as discussed in my research findings) had an effect. Interviews with them were more relaxed, all lasting for more than an hour (section 3.6).

Ethical use of WeChat interview

I did ten WeChat interviews. Before carrying out WeChat interviewing, all ethical documents were sent via WeChat to each of the participants. Confirming that they all had understood my research objective and their welfare and rights as participants in my research, I invited each participant to sign the participant consent form and send it with his/her e-signature back to me. All audio messages and texts in our conversations were automatically recorded via WeChat. Ethical principles previously discussed in this section were correspondingly followed during each WeChat interview. The participants' privacy was protected carefully by being anonymised when their accounts were transcribed, stored and quoted in my thesis.

3.3.4 Sampling

Sample size

There is a lack of consensus among qualitative researchers over the answer to 'What is the sample size in qualitative research?' (Trotter, 2016). Boddy (2016) argues that sample size is 'contextual' and determined by the research design. Boddy (*ibid*) articulates clearly that even research with a sample of one could be of significance and meaning; for example, in some contexts such as management or medical areas (Thomson et al., 2010). Braun and Clarke (2014) maintain that sample size should not be fully dependent on rules written in research guidebooks, but will be influenced by multiple factors, such as the research context, purpose, and the researchers' epistemology. They suggest a sample size of 15 to 30 individuals for novice qualitative researchers. This is consistent with Sandelowski's (1995) reminder to novice researchers that a sample size over 50 is usually labelled as a large sample (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

In respect of the above, I came back to my research context and purpose to look for the answer to an appropriate sample size for my research. Since my research investigates students' identity formation, both horizontally within each year-group and vertically amongst students in different stages of study. Thus, my participants should come from the four different years of undergraduate study at TU. My initial sampling plan was to recruit 40 students in total, including 10 with equal gender distributions from each stage of study. I started to contact students and invite them to participate in my research. However, the result of sample recruitment was unpredictable. In the end, I actually invited 45 students, comprising eighteen Yr1, eight Yr2, nine Yr3, nine Yr4, and one alumna.

I only recruited students from TU. Although TU is a case of '中外合作办学' (Sino-foreign cooperative universities) in China, it has differences from other universities in many respects, such as in management, the teaching

system and campus cultures (c.f. websites of the 9 Sino-foreign universities). Thus, the interrelationships between TU contexts and TU students' identity formation may not resemble those in other Sino-foreign cooperative HE institutions. My participants are not likely to act as 'representatives' of other Chinese students in other Sino-foreign learning contexts. In this respect, comparative data are not necessary for this research.

Non-probability sample

Since the pursuit of a generalisable result of identity formation amongst Chinese students is not my intent in doing this research, the 'width' of sampling is not necessary to my research, but 'depth' is of significance (Flick, 2014, p.177). To achieve this, I employed a non-probability sampling paradigm. As mentioned earlier, I employed snowball sampling paradigm after initially recruiting a small number of volunteers. Some commentators (e.g. Berg & Lune, 2012; Cohen et al., 2017) maintain that snowballing is an effective way to contact participants when random samples are difficult to locate; it is popular amongst researchers, who aim at, for example, 'sensitive topics' or difficult-to-reach populations (Berg & Lune, 2012, P.52).

My Yr1 students were approached relatively randomly via an invitation email from me sent by the Language Centre (LC) at TU, where all Chinese first-year students were enrolled. The repliers to this email constituted my Yr1 sample. The remaining respondents from Yr2 to Yr4 were the snow-ball samples, contacted by beginning with my personal connection.

Accessing Yr1 students via mixed approaches

In consideration of the possibility that some Chinese freshmen may lack adequate familiarity with English language, the invitation letter was written in both Chinese and English using a friendly tone. Eight students responded to this email. One student (Tan, F, Yr1) wrote back to me and said she

thought it was considerate to write this invitation in both English and Chinese, and she accepted my interview invitation just because of this.

One month later (October 2017) I started my interviews. During this time, no sample attrition occurred. Ten more students volunteered to participate in the interviews; four of them were introduced and invited by some of my first invitation volunteers; the remaining six were volunteers I met in a student assembly to which I was invited to share academic experiences with the Yr1 attendees. In the end, then, there were eighteen Yr1 participants of 2017 Entry.

Snowballing Yr2 to Yr4 students and the alumna

From Yr2 to Yr4, there were 37 participants who were located through my personal networks and by snowballing, since there was no access to all Yr2 to Yr4 Chinese population. Ten of them who had already known me for a year, including six male and four female students, were self-selected to participate in my interviews. Another two are 'WeChat friends' Whom I met them in a workshop we attended together. The remaining twenty-five were introduced and volunteered to participate my research.

When I started to conduct interviews, my sampling was still on-going. By June 2018, 45 students had agreed to participate in the interviews to share their narratives.

Introducing the students

There are eighteen Yr1 participants (2017 Entry), 26 Yr2 – Yr4 participants, and one alumna of TU, who was doing her master's degree in a university in the UK when interviewed (Figure 3.2). My participants come from twelve schools and units (see Appendix IV).

Year	female	male	total
1	11	7	18
2	3	5	8
3	4	5	9
4	5	4	9
Alumna	1		1
Total	24	21	45

Figure 3.2 My samples

The alumna was 23 years old when I interviewed her; ages of the other students ranged from 19 to 23 years-old, except for one. This exception was a returning student who left TU because of illness and came back later to resume her undergraduate study from her second year. She was in her early thirties then. The two relatively mature participants were included to provide 'a broader continuum of life experiences' (Turner & Archer, 2002, p.54).

3.4 Interview procedures

Details of how I conducted interviews, -before, during and after interviewing.

3.4.1 Before interviewing

Before designing my interview protocol, I sought advice and guidance from educational and social research guidebooks (e.g. Atkins & Wallace, 2013; Cohen et al., 2017; Galletta, 2013; Silverman, 2000) and consulted experienced sociological researchers including my supervisor and elder sister learners. I bore certain important principles in mind - avoiding any ethical issues during and after the interviews, avoiding asking leading questions, and designing interviews closely aligned with my research

objective and research questions. Drawing on Arnett's (2000) assumption university experience as a time of emerging adulthood, together with knowledge of likes and dislikes of the 'post-90s' that I had learned from my observation of Chinese undergraduate students in TU, I finalised my interview guideline with nine questions (see Appendix II).

These questions included four main concepts related to my students' university lives (see below), without any sensitive questions. They were not compulsory questions and the sequence of questions was flexible, depending on the participants' responses and reactions during the interviews. My students were empowered to decide which topics they would like to talk about or not. Any question would be dropped during the interview as they required because they were the narrators of their own lives but were not supposed to be controlled by the researcher.

These questions I prepared were mainly used to present particular topics rather than leading this conversation. Any significant moments or people in their lives they would like to share with me were welcomed. Such significance would help to answer the very basic identity question 'Who am I?', the core concept of my research. While my obligation during the interview was not to let each of my students feel that I was 'a greedy detective' eager to spy on their lives and dig into their privacy. Rather, I reminded myself not to push any of them and create a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere for our conversations.

Four main concepts

I avoided 'talking about identity' directly with my students firstly because such questions were difficult to answer for undergraduate students according to my observations[14]. Secondly, my consideration was not to let

[14] I attended a student event, 'tearing off your labels' (撕掉标签 *si diao biao qian*), when students from different stages of study at TU were organised to give presentations on this topic. I noticed it was difficult for them to answer questions such as 'Who are you?' 'What is a Chinese student?'. I talked to some students there and they think they are who they are, and they could not use words to answer these questions.

an overemphasis on identity questions limit my students' answers in the interviews but to return their utterance rights to talk freely. Thus, all things my students would like to talk about – themselves, their academic and non-academic lives in their previous Chinese high school and at TU were welcomed in the interviews, - because these things reflect the identity question: 'who am I?'- rather than just encouraging 'correct answers' to my interview questions.

Arnett's (2000) assumptions about university and 'emerging adulthood' guided me to focus on four main aspects of my students' lives, - their study, daily life, relationships with *tongxue* (同学, schoolmates/classmates), tutors and parents and their 'worldview'. He (*ibid*) proposes college students will continue developing and evolving their identity under the influence of their college courses in three domains –work, love and worldview. My observation could establish the existence of such a development in multiple facets amongst at least some Chinese students I made friends with at TU before I started carrying out my current research.

Nevertheless, Arnett's (2000) three domains -work, love and worldview in American college students' identity formation could not be borrowed directly to guide my research because of the distinctions between Chinese and America societies and cultures. Firstly, in general, Chinese students, in high school and university, financially depend on their parents rather than taking part-time work commitments as their American counterparts do. 'Work' is not what Chinese students 'ought' to consider in Chinese cultural thinking, but 'study' is. Secondly, Chinese students are not encouraged to develop a romantic relationship in high school (Kong, 2008); those who have a girl/boyfriend may be regarded as 'trouble' students by their teachers and parents, receive didactic re-education and even be punished. Hua (M, Yr2) said his high school once issued severe public warnings against students who were found to have boy or girlfriends at school. Thus, 'love' is not an indispensable relationship to Chinese students, even when they are going to

university. Guan (M, Yr3), for example, said his parents had warned him not to start a romantic relationship when he first came to TU. Thirdly, Arnett (2000) discusses 'world view' in emerging adults' identity development in his work from a religious perspective. He puts it: 'A world view invariably includes religious beliefs, for example, beliefs about the ultimate origin of life, about the existence of a soul, about the existence of supernatural beings, and about our destiny after death.' (p.165). His statement does make sense in specific contexts, such as the USA, but in my research context, my students do express their views but only a few students talk about religious beliefs.

Specifically, 'study' is the particular embodiment in Chinese cultures of learning because the role 'student (学生 *xuesheng*)' connotes the first obligation, to study. Chinese students tend to rank 'study(学习 *xuexi*)' as their first mission in university (Cui, 2008; Fan, 2012). 'Daily life' covers topics about my participants' activities outside the classroom, including the extracurricular activities, Student Societies they take part in, their leisure time and hobbies. The third concept was extended to 'relationships with *tongxue*, tutors and parents' rather than be confined to 'romantic relationships'/'love' as Arnett proposes. In Chinese cultures of learning, *tongxue,* college *tongxue* in particular*,* play an important role in each student's university life because generally most Chinese students begin their relatively self-reliant life away from their parents but staying with their *tongxue* when entering university. Thus, my students were assumed to have much to share about their *tongxue*. Relationships with their tutors and parents were also discussed in the interviews because changes in these two relationships are likely to occur when students start their university life. At TU in particular, the changes may be more obvious. As its name suggests, TU consists of at least two main cultures, Chinese and British. Additionally, it aims to provide students with 'real British' educational experiences. This means that TU conditions are very different from those in Chinese high

schools in many aspects, such as the relationship between students and teachers/tutors. Also, when students leave their family for their university trajectories, with only distant support from and relatively less contact with their parents, their bonds with their parents may change. Thus, those three relationships in their transition from high school students to become emerging adults at TU are worth discussing in my interviews, to examine my students' self-development process. Lastly, 'worldview' was decided as the fourth concept in my interview design. In my observation of various Chinese undergraduate students as they explored themselves and their surroundings, they were faced with confusion, self-rejection as well as determination in their emerging adulthood. They desired to be heard. In this respect, their views on anything significant to them were welcomed in my interviews.

Four pilot interviews

I held pilot interviews with four non-participants. Three were carried out in a student canteen; one was in an unoccupied classroom. All pilot interviews lasted 30 to 40 minutes, during which, ethical principles were followed strictly.

Two major problems were identified from the pilot interviews. First, my preparations before interviewing were not sufficiently considered. When ending the second pilot interview, I found the audio-recorder was not switched on. This reminded me to double-check my audio-recorder and prepare one alternative before conducting interviews. Second, I found that the student canteen was not an ideal place for interviewing because of the continuous noise, although it was a cozy place. As a result, in the 'real' interviews, one professional audio-recorder and my personal mobile phone as an alternative were prepared as recording instruments during the interview, and the interviews were conducted in quiet public places, such as a classroom or the atrium of the teaching buildings.

These mistakes and others identified in the pilot interviews served as reminders for all my later interviews and never occurred in them. The four interviewees also offered useful suggestions, for example, a suggestion of adding a short questionnaire of participants' basic demographic information as an icebreaker before conducting each interview. Finally, my interview guideline was finalised with nine simple but open questions to help students get involved in our conversation and to relax them into talking about themselves at TU (see Appendix II).

3.4.2 During interviews

The participant consent form and participant information sheet (both English and Chinese versions) were firstly handed to each of my students and they were invited to read them before I started each interview. After they thoroughly understood my research objective and their autonomy as volunteer interviewees, such as refusing to answer any question to which they would not like to respond and withdrawing from the research at any time they wanted, they were invited to sign the consent form in Chinese *pinyin*. After emphasising our conversation would be totally recorded during the interview and reconfirming the interviewee had no queries to ask me, I would hand out the short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix III) and started with small talk, followed by the interview questions.

Audio recording was employed in all my off-line interviews because this method has been valued by many qualitative researchers (e.g. Bryman, 2001; Tian, 2008; Verma& Mallick, 1999) for its features of convenience and time-saving during interviews. Recording mistakes never arose during any formal interview after I had learned lessons from my pilot interviews. I double-checked my audio-recorder and prepared alternative recorder before each interview. While using audio-recorders, I was freed from keeping busy with note-taking and could keep eye contact with my participants and focus on non-verbal clues emerged in our conversations.

The first question in my interview guideline as a warm-up question was usually asked in the beginning of each interview. The other questions were asked not always following the pre-designed sequence but depending on the participant's own words and their interest I observed and interpreted in our conversation. Some questions were dropped in some of the interviews, if they were deemed inappropriate to that individual student. For example, when interviewing Lan (M, Yr4), I noticed he was concerned about the outline of his dissertation that must be submitted in a week. In this case, I listened to him talking about his dissertation first. He, then, continued talking about his academic experiences in the past four years, including his present and former classmates, his personal growth and opinions about this university and other related matters, for nearly an hour. Since the intention of my interview was to let students share what moments and events were significant to them rather than any issue I interpreted as important to them, Lan's talk was encouraged to continue without my intervention. In this respect, a few questions not closely related to what he was talking about were dropped. Some questions, however, were added according to his responses to make the interview as much a natural conversation as possible, while retaining my intended broad focus.

Research ethical guidelines were strictly applied during all the interviews. Any information which may potentially identify any participant was avoided; the researcher also reminded participants when they were talking about their previous and current classmates and teachers not to mention any names. My participants reported no sensitive, discomforting questions were asked during the interviews and all interviews were carried out in a friendly atmosphere. Each participant's autonomy and privacy were respected.

Following Galletta's advice (2013), I ended each interview with my sincere gratitude for their valuable support; also, I invited them to participate in the follow-up interviews months later. No participant refused my invitation directly and I was allowed to contact them later and check their availability. In the end, 7 volunteers, including two first year male students, two third

year (one female and male) and three fourth year (one female and two male) participated in the follow-up interviews.

Interviews with Yr1 participants

Interviews with all 2017 Entry Yr1 students were carried out first within two months (October and November 2017) to capture their authentic reactions and responses to the new TU conditions and fresh memories of their previous lives in high school. To these freshmen, I was regarded as a person with superior status because I was a second year doctoral student who may have 'powers'. Some admitted in the middle of the interview that they intended to come to 'answer' my questions. They treated me as an 'examiner' who was going to check their academic performance, sitting in front of them with an audio-recorder. The distance they imagined between me and them made them feel nervous at first. After Guo (M, Yr1) came into the interview room, I felt his over-cautiousness. He kept touching his nose, grinning awkwardly and asking me what he should say next. Zhang (F, Yr1) told me she panicked when she was asked to talk about her academic performance. Although I explained to her that my intention was only to listen to her stories at TU, she was still very careful in choosing her words. Yang (F, Yr1) was worried about whether her attitudes towards some teachers (a bit negative) might be reported to the 'authorities' and asked me to delete the details (without any identifying information) about what she had just said. And I did modify her accounts according to her request and let her check them until she felt safe.

I understand that the researcher's controlling power is inevitably overt in an interview, unlike in an everyday conversation (Wang & Yan, 2012). The researcher initiates questioning, while the respondent is expected to give responses to the interview questions. Even if the interviewee has a much higher social status than the interviewer, the balance of power is in favour of the latter. For example, the previous U.S. President Obama, played his role as an interviewee in Bill O' Reilly's interview (quoted in Wang & Yan,

2012, p.235). In my research, with the Yr1 participants, during the interviews, after leading my students into the interview discourse by asking some basic information such as their hometown and hobbies, I then played my role as a critical listener or a 'helping voice' (Lillrank, 2012, p.283) to encourage my students to continue telling their narratives, because the distance between us usually made them unwilling to open up to this strange interviewer and their unfamiliarity with the interview discourse made them cautious of their words. At this moment, I often broke the silence with my own narrative or my opinion to keep the interview going and avoid an awkward atmosphere (Talmage, 2012).

Interviews with Yr2 to Yr4 participants

Interviews with Yr2 to Yr4 participants (including the alumna) (27 in total) were carried out during December 2017 to July 2018. A third of them had built up social connections with me before I interviewed them. Conversations with them were relaxed. Other senior students could also behave naturally and confidently; perhaps, they had sufficient previous interview experiences. Yuan (Yr3, F) told me many students were familiar with interview procedure because they had participated in research conducted by their tutors. Different from conducting interviews with Yr1 participants, during the interviews with Yr2 to Yr4 students, I had less control and mostly I was listening to their stories. It was active listening: while listening, I was taking notes and considering which concepts I took down were worth the participant' further explanation or when I should give a response to the participant or cut in her/his conversation and steer the interview into the focus of my research objective.

For example, when interviewing Shu (F, Yr1), I found she was thrilled about the new environment and introduced her curriculum, her facilities in the teaching building and her dorm in detail. I had to occasionally intervene in her talks. Although her attitudes towards TU conditions were important, too much detail about the objective environment was not closely related to my

research purpose. Another important reason for disturbing her talk was that she only promised 30 minutes for this interview. Thus, I had to ensure our conversation was contained within the time limit.

3.4.3 After interviewing

Keeping in mind that ethical concerns should pervade the whole research (Atkins & Wallace, 2013), after each interview, the student was kindly inquired about any unclear issues on the interview and my research. The rights of withdrawing from the research at any time and verifying the interview transcript were underlined again.

Each audio-record was properly and immediately saved in my personal computer. A backup copy of each was also saved in a memory stick exclusively used for storing the interview audio data. The audio-recording was listened to after each interview as a 'debriefing' for the researcher in search for any potential mistakes in my interview skills or any potential ethical issues appearing in the interview to improve later interviews and further ensure no harm in any interview. Soon afterwards, interview transcription began while my memory of the interview was fresh and the interviewees were reachable. In this respect, in case of the appearance of any unclear recording, timely solution was relatively easily accessible than that in a delayed transcription.

Each student was informed of when his/her interview transcript was ready for checking if any would like to look through his/her own transcript. In the end, one transcript was sent as the participant required via her WeChat. Two were showed to the participants in a face-to-face meeting. One of them required to delete some details on cultural differences she noticed at TU because she was concerned the details may include her biased personal opinions. To respect the participant and obey the research ethical guidelines, the specific information never appeared in my research.

3.5 Data transcription and translation

I had collected 57 hours of recorded interviews. All interviews were fully transcribed in Chinese, and analysis was carried out on these versions, to avoid changes of meaning that may be introduced by translation. Partial translation into English was carried out (by myself, to protect participants' privacy) for quotations in this thesis. Translation is not a simple act of looking for equivalent codes in the target language and completing 'the rendition of text from one language to another' (Ivir, 1981, p.52). Cultural factors are crucial in translation (Christina, 2012). For example, some buzz words such as '刷夜 (*shuaye)*' or '学术局 (*xueshuju)*' were frequently used by these Chinese young people and it is difficult to find a straightforward corresponding translation into English. Thus, for these 'difficult' terms, I translated them into English non-equivalently and put the original Chinese characters with *pinyin* and brief extra explanation in footnotes for my readers to check.

3.6 Data coding and analysis

3.6.1 Seeking inspiration from a grounded theory approach

I follow Miles and Huberman's suggestion to qualitative researchers to 'pause and ponder' (1994, p.51) before starting data analysis to uncover main concepts, themes and issues related to the research objective and questions. Then, in order to comprehensively accomplish my analysis work, I returned to guidelines in the methodological literature (e.g. Auerbach et al., 2003; Cohen et al., 2017; Gibbs, 2009; Gribich, 2007). I was then inspired by the idea of grounded theory, which is widely regarded as an effective data collection and analysis approach in qualitative research (Gibbs, 2009; Gribich, 2007). The strength and features of grounded theory are that a grounded theory suggests 'constant comparison' (Gibbs, 2009,

p.50) between data, my understanding, and the theories I am going to employ pervading the whole qualitative research process. 'Constant comparison' is used to develop precise meanings and concepts from students' accounts in my research analysis of the evolving identity formation process.

Additionally, an intention of my research is to return to my participants their utterance rights and freedom. They are individuals in the first place rather than just data providers prepared to fit into specific pre-designed theoretical frameworks or personal development models. In this respect, some of the principles underlying a grounded theory approach guided me in the initial coding and analysis of my interviews data. It is important to state, however, that this influence did not lead me to adopt a 'full' grounded theory approach. Some of the methodological principles of grounded theory. The adoption of a 'theory-free' position in the early analysis of data gave me the flexibility that I needed to inform my thinking about the data and my on-going literature searches and engagement. This led to the identification and choice of particular theoretical perspective, which then informed both my ongoing data collection and the later stages of analysis. From this point onwards, my research followed what might be considered a 'conventional, qualitative approach, guided by an identified framework.

This is not the intention of my research, however, in light of the risk of losing direction in the process of analysing data; novice researchers are alerted by Yeung (1997) and Goulding (2002) to this potential risk in using grounded theory. Accordingly, although I sought to guide data coding and analysis in a grounded theory approach, I employed Arnett's (2000) assumption of emerging adulthood to serve as a starting point, Giddens's autobiography of identity and Archer's modes of reflexivity as analytical devices in my research (see section 2.1.3). My use of Arnett as the research developed provides an illustration of the impact and effectiveness of constant comparison; while retaining his idea of university as a time of emerging

adulthood and starting off with his three 'domains', my own data suggested a rethink of these domains for the Chinese context.

3.6.2 Data coding and analysis

Coding procedures

Following the approach of grounded theory, data are coded and analysed while being collected (Gibbs, 2009; Gribich, 2007). After interviewing each student, the interview was transcribed and open coded. Open coding in this step mainly aims to categorise themes emerging in students' accounts and seek connections between and within each participant and participants belonging to each year, to reflect on my wording and interview skills to better the following interviews, and to consider potential theories which suit my research context and could help to explain the identity formation of my students.

In the first round of coding, I categorised all interview accounts (in Chinese) based on four concepts (study, daily life, relationships and 'worldview') and placed data related to each concept into each file. It is worth noticing that in the beginning of coding, I learned and tried to use Nvivo for coding, but it seems that the Nvivo version that I could access is not very efficient in coding Chinese characters. I then returned to the conventional method to store data on each concept in separate files. My second round of coding focused on two frequent themes, time and comparison, in each concept. Actually, these two themes constitute almost all my students' interview accounts. Whatever topics my students talked about, they tended to compare their previous experiences with what they were engaged in TU, including their relationships with their parents, friends, tutors and their hobbies and even preference in clothes and food, in their 'past' and 'present' school lives. This phenomenon actually reflects Giddens's idea of the autobiographic identity - the past self, coming from past experiences, influencing the present and even anticipating the future self. Then, I highlighted words in the accounts using different colours according to each

sub-theme and according to each participant's account. Thirdly, I noticed some words/characters that frequently emerged from their accounts, such as TU/TUers, student societies and brother/sister learners; these words reflected some newly learned dispositions my participants shared at TU; participants at each year of study seem to share similar comments on these dispositions. Thus, I highlighted them in the third round of coding for further comparing between students of each year of study.

The entire network of codes found in the interview accounts are presented as follows (Figure 3.3), illustrating my participants' transition from high school (HS) to TU in general and grounding my analysis.

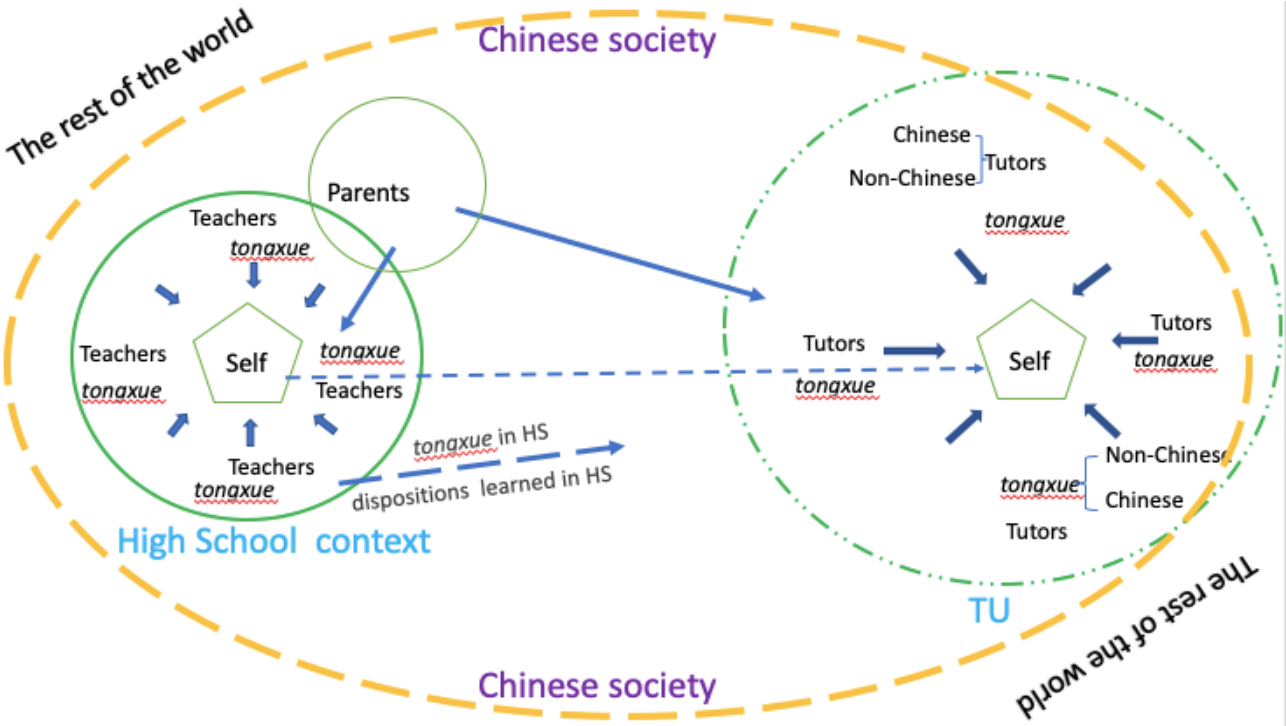

Figure 3.3 the entire network in one's transition from High School to TU

In the network, the bigger solid green circle represents the participants' high school context, relatively isolated from the outside Chinese society and from the more distant 'the rest of the world', while the dashed green circle, the TU context, symbolises an environment less isolated from its surroundings and more open to their influences. TU consists of both Chinese and non-Chinese students and staff physically located in the Chinese society. The navy-blue dashed line illustrates one participant's transitional trajectory

from Chinese high schools to TU. The process can be interpreted as an individual's natural maturation and a cultural embodiment of the particular Chinese cultures of learning – because for most Chinese students, the next significant step after graduating from high school is going to university (Duan, 2015). The smaller green circle representing parents' influences overlapping the students' high school life is relatively distant from their college life. Parents' connections with students' college life may be distant but they do not disappear in my research because in general Chinese college students continue to depend on their parents, at least financially and often in other ways.

Also, parents' social and economic capital generally continue to exert a positive impact on college students (Yin & Zou, 2016; Zhang & Wang, 2015), and all the blue solid arrows illustrate the connection net within a participant's life. The large yellow dashed circle draws the boundary between the influence of 'the rest of the world' and Chinese society, but the boundary is porous and Chinese society cannot be completely isolated from the outside world. The links with the participants' previous learned dispositions in living and learning, with their parents and former *tongxue* (classmates) in high school connected their past in high school and present at TU. My participants' identity formation can be reflected in the network consisting of these themes.

Analysis procedures

My data analysis procedures were also divided into three steps, based on the three rounds of coding but not simply parallel with them because the codes I sorted were not isolated but interrelated in my participants' life trajectories, as their identity was constantly developed.

Drawing on Giddens's idea of autobiographic identity, 'time' was brought into the first two steps of data analysis. In other words, themes related to my participants' 'past self' would be found in the first step as their 'origins'

(see section 4.1), while themes of their lives at TU were all analysed in the second step. In this step, data were compared both horizontally (within each year-group) and vertically (across year-groups). Concepts including 'study', 'daily life', 'worldview' and 'relationships with schoolmates, tutors and parents' emerged in the coding procedure were grounded when analysing the interview accounts. To avoid contaminating my students' own accounts with my subjectivity, I initially present my students' accounts of what they perceived as their identity in Chapters IV and V, based on the coding that largely emerging from those accounts, but without explicit use of my identified core theoretical models, which I bring in for Chapter VI as my third step of analysis.

3.7 Research validity and reliability

Many scholars have argued and justified the impossibility of applying positivist criteria of validity and reliability and the inevitability of biases and subjectivity in carrying out qualitative research (Kuzmanić, 2009; Tian, 2008; Maxwell, 1992; Mishler, 1990; Cho & Trent, 2006; Whittemore et al., 2001). Validity in qualitative research may 'be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness… of the data achieved' (Winter, 2000, cited in Cohen et al., 2017, p.304). Different from quantitative data, which pursues faithfulness in positivism, qualitative data aim to present in-depth meanings, largely depending on presentation and interpretation of respondents' narratives, such as interview accounts or ethnography, which must therefore be accepted on the respondents' own terms unless there are good reasons to doubt their authenticity. The anecdotal nature of qualitative research should not be regarded as a flaw to be overcome; otherwise, the overemphasis on criteria may trigger problems (Cho & Trent, 2006) or even 'ruin' the validity of qualitative research (Kvale, 1996, cited in Kuzmatic, 2009, p.42). Mishler (1990) argues that trustworthiness of qualitative research lies in its contextuality and the respondent's authenticity; therefore, he suggests the use of 'alternative criteria' (Mishler, 1990, p.435)

in qualitative research. In line with Mishler's argument (*ibid*), Maxwell (1992) advocates taking 'understanding' as a replacement for validity in qualitative research, rather than simply pursuing conventional quantitative analytical validity. Qualitative validity pertains to how researchers understand their research purposes, contexts and procedures (*ibid*). Maxwell presents various types of validity, such as descriptive (p.285) and interpretive validity (p.288), to clarify the nature of qualitative validity.

Later researchers (see Cohen et al., 2017; Cho & Trent, 2006; Kuzmatic, 2009; Silverman, 2000) focus more on 'solutions' to keep qualitative research valid. Silverman (2000) maintains that validity issues in qualitative research are attributable to the 'anecdotalism' (p.176) in the process of conducting the research. He suggests, for example, selecting 'deviant' respondents while sampling (p.179) or/and using comparative methods while analysing data to enhance the generalisability of qualitative samples and findings.

Cohen et al. (2017) emphasise the employment of triangulation during the whole process of qualitative research to ensure validity. They (*ibid*) encourage qualitative researchers to consider multiple dimensions of triangulations, including time, methodological and investigator triangulation (p.332). Firstly, when designing qualitative research, researchers should not forget to consider changes in research contexts and respondents as influential factors. Drawing on longitudinal or cross-sectional data can help researchers capture these nuances during research. Data collected by more than one method will also qualify the reliability of the research. Many qualitative researchers have applied this suggestion. For example, Tian (2008) discusses utilising diaries, interviews and observation in her doctoral thesis to collect her data to depict a holistic picture of Chinese students studying in the UK. Investigating the researched phenomena from multiple perspectives is another way to enhance quality. Cohen et al. (2017) suggest recruiting more than one respondent or collecting data from more than one observer.

Learning from these suggestions, I carefully considered and designed my research to try to ensure instrument and data trustworthiness. Firstly, I realised that with the purpose of examining individuals' development, changes and evolution in research were two important themes I should look for. Time triangulation was the first application in my research design. Given the time and economic constraints in my doctoral study, I decided to conduct cross-sectional research, recruiting students from different stages of their studies (first year to fourth year), both male and female students from various schools within TU. Secondly, I collected data mainly through the extended interviews and also carried out ethnographic observation. Interview accounts could address my research questions of these students' self-perceptions on who they think they are and how they form their identity at TU. Although given the ethical concerns, my observation data could not be presented in my thesis, they supported my research in another important way, as background information to facilitate my understanding of my research context and subjects. My ethnographic observation, in some of my students' social activities, in particular, defined my liminal role of both a researcher and a participant in these students' personal development. It could also help to avoid wrong interpretations of important concepts and moments in my students' lives at TU because I was aware of these moments or even experienced them.

Thirdly, I carried out four pilot interviews with four non-participants to try out my interview designs, interview places and atmosphere and audio recorders. Taking consideration of avoidance of mis-hearing, mis-transcribing or misunderstanding during research, all interviews were conducted in Chinese to ensure every participant could understand the researcher's question and experienced a relaxed conversation. Audio-recordings were kept and duplicated for safety purposes. Follow-up interviews were considered to pursue further changes in these students' lives. Lastly, while analysing data, through cross-sectional comparison, data from 'new' students and 'old' students interweaved as a matrix to uncover

lives at TU. 'Old' students' retrospective lives reflected in 'new' students' description and experiences; while 'new' students' expectations and visions of their futures can be seen to some extent. All these measures would help to enhance the validity and reliability of research.

In total, 45 students shared accounts of their lives at TU with me, providing 45 different perspectives to help me learn about their growth and identity development. Although 45 is not a small sample in qualitative research, my research design might be accused of a lack of generalisability. In line with the argument that there is no reliability in the positivist sense in qualitative research (Cohen et al, 2017; Tian, 2008), I defend my research for its 'unrepresentativeness'. Firstly, the nature of qualitative research determines that my work should depend on details of students' words, attitudes, opinions, experiences, feelings and anything else related to their lives, rather than quantitative categorisation of a large population. Constraints of time, practicality and expense limit the size of the sample of students I could feasibly research, but I have recruited as many participants who volunteered to attend this research and showed deep interests in the project as I could[15]. Many of the personal stories of this relatively small group of Chinese students are inspiring and meaningful in understanding lives in this Sino-British university. Secondly, my students expressed their strong dislike of often being wrongly labelled by outsiders of TNHE. They neither accepted to be represented by their peers nor refused to represent their peers. As T.S. Elliot (1915) wrote in '*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, 'no I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be…', every individual deserves a life of his/her own however small and ordinary it might appear to be to those outside that life. These students uttered their own words in this research and their accounts are not presented and interpreted solely to achieve my research purpose, but authentically to present their experiences, attitudes and feelings – to 'give them voice'. This approach can

[15] Braun and Clarke (2014) suggest a range from 15 to 30 in a qualitative study. I successfully invited 45 students to join in my research.

ensure my research validity, although it brings difficulties in conducting interviews and selecting analytical framework. The validity of my research is my determination to reveal the subjective 'truth' of these students' experiences and feelings, and my willingness to let them speak for themselves without pushing or adding my personal judgement.

Chapter IV TU and Students' Life Trajectories: An Overview

Chapter IV together with the next two chapters display my research findings and analysis. This chapter provides some basic information of my students' life at TU and their backgrounds such as their previous educational experiences and their parental statuses. It falls into two main parts: basic information before my students coming to TU and an overview of their life at TU.

Before moving on, I would clarify the theoretical framework guiding me to present my students' life trajectories. Firstly, I am inspired by Burke and Stet's (2009) identity theory (see section 2.1.3). From an integrated perspective, I have realised that my participants' data indicate complexity in their perceptions of their identity formation. Specifically, they are aware of their social roles and would like to behave 'properly' in their roles, such as being a TU student or a team member in the student society they joined. At the same time, they desire to be different by distinguishing themselves within the group. Thus, deliberately categorising their self- and social-identity separately will not present how they form their identity at TU. Burke and Stets' suggestion of an integrated approach is helpful to address my participants' identity formation at TU. Moreover, as Giddens's (1991) idea of anticipation of identity illustrates, one's previous dispositions and experiences will continue to impact on one's present and even future identity formation. These basic data about my students are fundamental in understanding their identity formation in TU. Additionally, the concept 'dispositions' in Bourdieu's works is useful in my research as well. It helps me to understand both the TU context and my participants' previous experiences. Firstly, when these students came into TU, inevitably, they brought with them their previous dispositions/habitus in learning and living that they learned in Chinese schools and society. They then encountered the TU context: the British learning dispositions, such as English-medium teaching and critical thinking, in its academic domain at least; and major

Chinese dispositions outside classrooms, such as Chinese language as the major communicative medium in daily life and living independently in dormitories with other Chinese peers. It is the differences or even conflicts between these students' previous habitus and the dispositions in the TU context that motivate their 'internal conversation' after (or even in some cases before) coming to TU.

The concept 'family system' retains significance in my students' life trajectories at TU. Although the physical distance between parents/family and the students becomes greater, parental attachment for many of my participants remains strong. Parents continue to support these students financially and affectively. Briefly, all these elements are significant in guiding my research and data analysis.

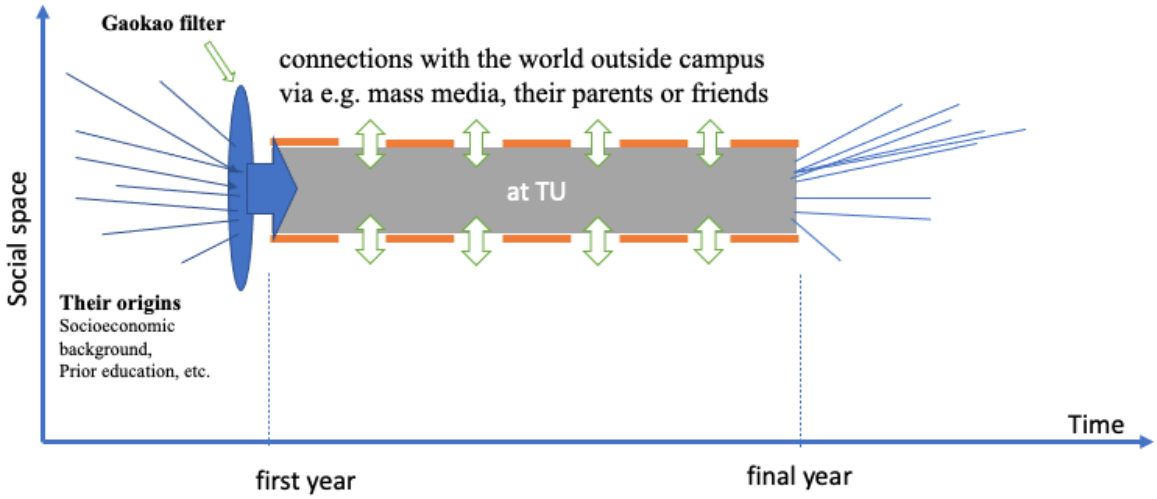

Figure 4.1 The students' life trajectories before coming to and at TU

Figure 4.1 depicts the life trajectories of Chinese students before going to and while studying at TU. Simply, the blue lines in the diagram represent their 'lifelines', and TU is like a 'perforated' tube, where students coming from different backgrounds and regions of China are 'collected'. This 'tube' provides these students with a shared path to become 'TUers'[16]. Not any

[16]Adding the suffix '-er' to an abbreviation of a university seems to have become a popular self-label for university students; for example, HKUers, referring to students/alumni of Hong Kong University (see Varma's post on HKU website, 2014) and PKUer, a label-page

student who wants to study at TU, however, can enter this 'tube'. Admission is ultimately controlled by *Gaokao* (the Chinese abbreviation for the National Higher Education Entrance Examination) as a filter to let only those applicants enter, whose *Gaokao* results reach the cut-off-score of TU. Other factors may also impact on whether students and/or their parents will choose this university, such as the amount of tuition fees. The annual tuition fees of TNHEIs are on average 10 or 20 times higher than those of Chinese state-universities (Tuition fees of Chinese state-universities: RMB 4,000 to 6,000 for common subjects; RMB 7,000 to 12,000 for Arts, such as painting or acting) (Sina.com, 2019).

4.1 Before going to TU: their origins

As I discussed in section 2.1.3 (see pp.34-35), Giddens (1991) compares individuals' identity formation to their 'autobiography' (p.76). Any significant events in their autobiography can help to explain who they are and may also 'anticipate' (p.75) who they are going to become in the future. This 'anticipation' can be understood as an aspect of individuals' reflexivity, which leads them to the trajectory they are feeling their way towards. As proposed in the Chapter I (see pp.6-13) and section 2.1.3, studying identity in the 21st century is far from seeking 'an essence' or certain determinants; rather, it is recognised that identity development is fluid and multi-faceted, in multiple dimensions and encompassing many possibilities (Hermans & Dimaggion, 2007; Meiji, 2010).

With this in mind, I shall first discuss 'their origins' – themes arising from the past in their lives before going to university. These themes emerge from their own accounts, including their original domicile[17], family socioeconomic

on Peking University Bulletin Board System, referring to students/alumni of Peking University. Students and alumni at TU also label themselves in this way as TUers.

[17] Students' original domicile place (*hukou*) will decide where they can take the *Gaokao* examination; application for university/major and the *Gaokao* cut-off-score will be closely

status, and some of their previous schooling experiences. In the examination of their perception of 'who they think they are', retrospection played a crucial role because mention and discussion of their perceptions of themselves often arose when we were talking about what they had experienced before going to TU. They often, consciously discussed and even challenged their 'origins' (e.g. Lan's accounts on p. 127) and struggled between the old influences from their origins and influences coming from their new experiences at TU and between their past self and the one they desired to become (e.g. Guan and Yue's accounts on p. 127).

In my research, these students' 'origins' are the features of their past dispositions in learning and living before going to TU that emerge in their interview accounts. They are from different regions of China (see Figure 4.1.1), born and growing up in China with Chinese nationality. These participants in my research are all 'Chinese students' (see p.6 in Chapter I). Their family background including their parents' educational and occupational statuses and the number of children in their family also vary (see Figure 4.1.2, 4.1.3). These geographic and socioeconomic background differences exert direct influence on their previous schooling and *Gaokao*. They also led students to differ in evaluating their 'origins' and viewing themselves, others and the contemporary Chinese society. Additionally, their attitudes vary towards a variety of key values, such as money and the importance of study and scores, which can be traced – in part at least – to this diversity of their origins. In what follows, I shall implicate the divergence in the students' origins as a source of other observed divergences.

related to it. TU is not officially allowed to recruit undergraduate students from all provinces in China.

4.1.1 Geographical origins

Figure 4.1.1 Their geographical origins

My participants are from 19 different provinces of China (Figure 4.1.1); three are from the province, a south-eastern coastal region, where TU is located. According to Fei (1992[1947]) (see section 2.1.4), kinships are significant in Chinese society. Geographic origin as one type of kinships in Chinese society constructs interpersonal relationships amongst Chinese people. For example, people coming from the same region of China call each other '*tongxiang*' or '*laoxiang*'. Some of my students mentioned the importance of '*laoxiang'* in their university life. For example, Shu defined '*laoxiang*' as 'a warm existence'.

> When I had a fever, they companied me to go to hospital and stayed with me from midnight till 6 o'clock in the morning. They are not my roommates; they had morning classes the other day; but when I texted them, they never hesitated to come to help me. (Shu, F, Yr1)

Some students also spontaneously compared and divided TU students according to their geographic origins. Their comparisons are presented along two dimensions as follows.

A small place versus a more developed and 'civilised' region

It is widely accepted amongst Chinese people that the south-eastern coastal regions of China are much richer and more 'civilised' and developed than many inland cities and regions, and they attribute it simply to 'geographic advantages' of coastal regions. Some of my students, those from inland cities in particular, had similar views. For example, Lan rated these so-called advantages highly and believed they helped widen students' horizons and awaken their capabilities. By contrast, he saw his hometown, a city in the north-west of China, as 'a small place[18]'and he remarked,

> I came from a 'small' place [in Ningxia province]. In that small place, I don't think anyone at my age will be capable…to perfectly complete their academic tasks and other assignments in Student Societies they attended…but at TU, I do meet people with this capability. (Lan, M, Yr4)

Yuan, from the north-east of China, blamed in part the small place where she grew up for hindering her self-development.

> When I graduated from high school, I was not strong-minded [because] I was born in a small town and I had no idea of what I liked or disliked. (Yuan, F, Yr3)

Guan (M, Yr3), also from the north-east, thought highly of the civilisation of the south-eastern coastal regions of China by observing that vehicles in this area will stop for pedestrians who are crossing the road. Yue had similar impressions about the civilisation of this area. He even started to dislike his hometown – a municipality in an inland region – when he went back after his first semester at TU.

[18] The concept of 'a small place' in Chinese implies that people coming from there may be barely literate and with no idea of the wider world. People tend to rate a region according to its economic development level. The coastal regions are usually believed to be more economically advanced than inland regions in China.

> When I returned home, I had a strong feeling that [the fellow people here] have some bad habits such as talking too loudly, regarding ugliness as beauty… being reluctant to change mentally. I know I should not criticise my hometown like this, but it is my real feeling. (Yue, M, Yr1)

Shi (F, Yr1) and Ning (F, Yr1), both from inland regions (Sichuan and Yunnan province respectively), noted that it was time for young people to come out of the familiar home context and see and experience a different world when going to university. For the two female students, the south-eastern coastal regions were their first choice, because of the booming economic development there. They both commented that this region went down well with them and they seldom missed their hometown.

Inequality in educational levels and opportunities

Some students maintained that educational levels and qualities in some south-eastern coastal regions, for example, Zhejiang province, may be higher than those in many inland cities of China. Differences in English teaching standards in particular between Zhejiang and other parts of China seem to be the most salient points commented on.

These distinctions between inland and coastal locations also appeared in 'reverse' perspectives. One student from Zhejiang province described Shaanxi, an inland province, as 'remote' and commented: 'I know some of my classmates coming from the remote regions, such as Shaanxi, whose English proficiency was very low…' (Shen, F, Yr4). On the other hand, although Shen thought these students were very bad at spoken English, and they could not speak English at all when they first came into TU, she noticed that they seemed to work much harder to practice their English. Shen gave an example of one student from Shaanxi who had far more passion in learning English than her and ended up with a much higher English proficiency. She, then, mocked herself as 'a lazy student from Zhejiang province' who failed to make good use of her prior educational advantages.

> [Although] the level of English teaching in Zhejiang is much higher than that in Shaanxi, my language hasn't become better, because I paid less attention to improving my English. (Shen, F, Yr4)

Additionally, the geographical origins of students were related to limitations in the choices of university and major available to them. This in turn limited their agential power over their own futures, although it is the social and educational conditions, not simply location, which are the real influences.

Feng, from the north-west of China thought her hometown lacked the advantages of other Chinese cities. This exerted direct influence on her when choosing a major to study in TU after *Gaokao*.

> I chose to study this major (economics) because it was the only one I was interested in among the limited options distributed to Xinjiang province[19]. (Feng, F, Yr4)

4.1.2 Family of origin

Multifold aspects of my students' family origins emerged from their interview accounts, including the socio-economic status of their family, their parents' occupational and educational statuses, their family structure (one child family or not) and influences from parenting style and their relationships with parents.

[19] In 2015, when Feng enrolled at TU, the applicants for undergraduate study at TU from Xinjiang province could choose from 14 major options. The options provided by TU in many provinces and places ranged from 18 (e.g. Hunan province) to 22 (e.g. Zhejiang province). That year, Ningxia province was offered the least number of major options, only 10, followed by Gansu with 11 and Shannxi with 13 (*Gaokao* information, 2019). Although, these provinces are literally inland regions, geographic difference cannot be the only reason for this inequality in major provisions, given the complexity of *Gaokao* enrollment system. For example, TU only started to enroll candidates from Guangdong, a south-eastern coastal province, in 2017; the number of major options given to Guangdong was only 9 (TU website, 2020).

Family socio-economic background: a hidden prerequisite

Family socio-economic background constitutes a crucial (maybe 'hidden') prerequisite for these students to enroll at TU and make a choice of which major they would study there, although many of them may not realise it or may take it for granted. In fact, only a small proportion of *Gaokao* candidates with similar scores to my students' have this option of going to TU, because of its higher tuition fees (110,000 RMB from 2020) as I previously discussed. Data from China's National Bureau Statistics (Stats. Gov. cn, 2020) illustrates that the average personal per capita disposable income in the first three quarters in 2020 was RMB 23,781 per annum. Only a small number of families in China are likely to afford to support their children to study in TNHEIs such as TU. In this respect, these students studying in TU constitute a particular group mostly from 'well-off' families. Figure 4.1.2, a summary of their parents' occupations, shows that more than half of my participants are from entrepreneurial families. One student whose father is in business claimed that this is a commonly shared feature of TU students:

> I know most students in our university share similar family backgrounds. (Feng, F, Yr4)

Occupation	No. taken by	
	Mother	Father
Business owner	13	23
Housewife	8	/
Accountant	7	1
Government official	6	7
State-run company employee	4	3
Teacher	3	1
Engineerer	2	4
Doctor	1	4
Bank employee	1	/
Bank manager	/	1
State-run company manager	/	1
Number in total		45

Figure 4.1.2 Participating students' parental occupations

Some of my students were aware of their family status influences on their decision-making in choosing university and major after *Gaokao*. Yue (M, Yr1) claimed that his parents were 'just salary-persons'; they could not have afforded to send him to TU. His father, however, did some business when Yue was in high school and earned some money; that was why he could go to TU. Nevertheless, Yue was often under a tight budget and had to economise on the already limited living expenditure funded by his parents. He applied for a business major in TU because,

> I am interested in IS. But I know studying politics will not help me to find a job but majoring in business will help me to earn more money…I have to think for earning my livelihood. (Yue, M, Yr1).

Yue aspired to spend some time studying in the UK, but he assumed his parents might not support his overseas future study because 'Gaining a master's degree in the UK is costly; my family cannot afford it.' He was aware of his situation and tried to figure out a solution for himself.

> I will try to get a position for a year's exchange in the UK campus when I am in Yr3. As to studying abroad, if I can get an offer from G5[20], I think my parents may allow me to go to the UK because a G5 diploma makes it worthwhile to spend that money. (Yue, M, Yr1)

Yi's situation was in direct contrast to Yue's. Yi was an IS major; he claimed that most of his classmates had transferred from IS to business, for they were afraid that IS would not be a premium for a well-paid job, but business would. Yi did not panic, however; he was sure that his family would financially support him to do what he wished.

[20] The G5 is a grouping of five English public research universities that was established in early 2004. The members are Imperial College London, the London School of Economics, the University of Cambridge, the University of Oxford and University College London (Wikipedia G5 universities).

> I am never worried about how much money I would earn in the future. I do not lack money. I insist on studying IS for my interest. … I value internal happiness and experience of life. … As to my future work, teaching is good for me. … I may teach history or politics. (Yi, M, Yr2).

Family structure: a cultural condition

Before January 2016, when the two-children policy officially came into effect in China (China daily. com.cn, 2015), most Chinese families had only one child. A summary of my students' family structure (Figure 4.1.3) shows that 37 of them are the only child in their family, and 8 have siblings. Their accounts indicate that family structure impacts on them in their decision-making of what they will do in the future. Briefly, among my students, the responsibility of supporting aged parents to the only-child and the firstborn child seems to be heavier than that to those who have elder siblings because supporting aged parents is believed to be children's obligation according to Chinese cultural traditions of filial piety and morality (Chinacourt.org, 2020; Huanqiu.com, 2017). This tradition is also deeply embedded in the minds of my students, these 'post-90s' generation.

Family structure		
Only child	37	
Having siblings	8	two little sisters 1 one elder sister 1 two elder sisters 1 one little brother 5

Figure 4.1.3 Participants' family structure

Two students having elder sister(s) noted that they need not take supporting their parents into consideration because their sister(s) would take that responsibility instead, when talking about their future aspirations.

> I have two elder sisters; both are working [in my hometown]. I won't need [to come back] to take care of my parents when they are old. So, I won't have much pressure. (Zhao, M, Yr2)

> I will probably do my Master in the US … because it is possible to immigrate to the US … I have an elder sister. So, I am not worried about whether my parents can immigrate and stay with me … (Chu, M, Yr3)

By contrast, Jiang, the eldest daughter in her family, when talking about her future work, first considered her family rather than her own career development.

> If possible, I would like to work abroad and bring my parents with me because I am worried about their health. I am from Hebei province. Air pollution there is terribly heavy. (Jiang, F, Yr4)

Xu, an only-child, thought he may have a better career development in a place far away from his parents, but the value of filial piety reminded him to reconsider this option.

> If I didn't need to consider my family, I would choose to work abroad, because what I am learning (IS)[21] is not useful when I am working in China… [But], my parents cannot go abroad … (Xu, M, Yr1)

Rong, another only-child, will encounter a similar situation in the future. He preferred to experience different lifestyles in different places around the world rather than dwell in a fixed place, but he may not travel too much because he is expected to settle down for his parents.

> That is my obligation to look after my parents. (Rong, M, Yr3)

[21] Zhou, another IS major, holds a similar view that IS graduates from TU may have fewer opportunities to find a job in China because she thinks: 'graduates from Chinese universities will have much more opportunities to work in China in the future because their universities have much closer social connections with domestic companies. But we need to look for opportunities in overseas labour market.' (F, Yr4).

Parental occupations: a potential influence on future career

Some participants acknowledged that their parents' experiences of work and their suggestions to their offspring impacted on their decision-making about their choice of major learning at TU and their career aspirations.

> My father is doing his own business … He expected me to do business too after my graduation. He wanted me to learn business in university. … So, I decided to learn IBM [because] he hoped I could become a manager. (Shen, M, Yr4)

Zhang (F, Yr1) chose to study business because of the encouragement of her parents' experiences too. When asked to envision her future career, she supposed that she would do her own business as her father does because being self-employed for her might be easier than being an employee.

Apart from learning from their parents, some students reported that their parents' experiences exerted negative effects and discouraged their decision-making on envisioning their future career and what they were going to be or not to be. When talking about his next step after graduation from TU, Ou said he had decided to work as a teacher rather than being a businessman like his father, although his initial plan at TU was to transfer to the School of Business at the second year of study.

> [When I recalled that] my father was always busy with social engagement for his business when I was young, and seldom stayed at home with me … I decided not to transfer to the School of Business at Yr2. … I don't want to be like him. (Ou, M, Yr4)

Similarly, Shan (F, Yr1) decided she would probably not work as a government official as her parents did because she thinks it might not be a suitable job for her after constantly watching the routine nature of her parents' work.

> My parents are government officials. I have heard a lot of stories of their office work. I feel I don't like just sitting in the office every day. (Shan, F, Yr1)

Tan is dejected about the prospect of being a teacher like her father, although teaching is widely regarded as an 'ideal' job for women amongst the Chinese public (EOL, 2018). Statistics show that proportions of female teachers in Chinese schools, at all levels from preprimary to senior high schools, keep rising (Chinese Education Information Website, 2018). In 2018 in preprimary schools, 97-98% of teachers were female; over half of the staff in other levels of schools were female (*ibid*). Tan held her own view of her future, however.

> … My father wanted me to become a teacher in the future. He thought it was good for a girl. But why should I become what he wanted me to become? … Many of my relatives are teachers. I have had a clear knowledge of what being a teacher is like and I am tired of living a life as theirs. I will challenge myself and do something different. (Tan, F, Yr1)

Shan's and Tan's cases echo an interesting finding in Hou and Leung's study (2011) about influence from parents' expectations on children's career decision-making. Their data revealed that girls are more likely than boys to take up careers different from their parents' expectations. Another survey examining over 7,000 college students (the number of female and male students almost equal) from 10 provinces of China also found that girls often attempted to break the stereotype of female occupations by choosing traditional 'masculine jobs', for example, being an entrepreneur rather than a teacher (Zuo & Wen, 2009).

Additionally, contemporary Chinese parents may also expect some changes from existing norms in their children's future careers. A survey conducted in 2015 showed that many parents have started to challenge some Chinese conventions on career, for example, 'inheriting father's occupation' (*子承父业 zichengfuye*) (Wang, 2015). These parents no longer wanted their

children to do the same jobs as they did. According to the survey, only 23.5% of the 2003 participants wished their children to do the same work as they did; most hoped their children could freely choose what they liked to do. Interestingly, some parents even noted explicitly that they would stop their children from choosing the same careers as theirs (*ibid*). Zheng's parents hold a similar view with those parents in the survey.

> My parents are both accountants, so are their friends. They know this career and have seen the dark sides in this career. They strongly disagree me entering this career. Instead, they hope I can do some technical work. (Zheng, M, Yr3)

Relationship with their parents: a psychological bond

Only one student, Jia, mentioned there was some tension between her and her parents. She mentioned her intention to go to a university in the north of China, far away from her hometown, close to the side of TU. At first, she explained that this was because she loved the food in the north. What she mentioned later, however, suggested that TU or its location was not the 'real' reason why she was eager to go to a 'distant' university:

> I have never left my hometown since I was born… I hoped I could go to a place faraway from here when I went to university … That might be because my relationship with my parents was not very good. I wanted to escape from them. (Jia, F, Yr4)

Jia's account revealed her contradictory feelings on her relationships with her parents. On the one hand, she was unhappy that her parents watched her too closely when she was at home, which contributed to her feeling of needing to escape. On the other hand, she admitted that she would feel safe if she knew she could continue to depend on her parents. In other words, Jia desired for more space for her personal growth. In the meantime, she seems unready to manage everything on her own.

Most of my students noted that their relationships with their parents were friendly and relaxed. For example, Cai (M, Yr2), Zhao (M, Yr2) and Zhang (F, Yr1) all described their families as democratic because they felt their parents respected their opinion about their own lives in particular. Fang even felt proud when talking about her parents.

> My parents are open-minded; they are like my friends…. Every time I WeChat with them in my dorm, my roommates are jealous about my good relationship with my parents. They told me they could not talk with their parents in the way I did. (Fang, F, Yr1)

This friendly parenting style seems to contribute to students' development of self-reliance. For example, Zhao (M, Yr2) identifies himself as an independent-mindedly person because he noted his parents seldom interfered in his decisions.

> Even if they disagreed with my idea, I was still allowed to follow my own heart. … For example, my parents suggested me choosing a major related to economics or finance, but I insisted on Computer Study here. And they did not stop me in the end. (Zhao, M, Yr1)

Lan (M, Yr4) said his parents provided him with enough space and autonomy to grow up. This parenting is different from the traditional Chinese style.

> My parents always let me decide what I like to do… Once I told them I wanted to drop out of one final examination in Grade Three in my high school because I thought I had not prepared well for this examination. They told me if I could take responsibility of this decision on my own without asking for their help, then I could drop out. Then, I dropped it. That is my parents' education. … In my high school, I did many things as I wished, and they did not try to manipulate me. Now in university, I am subjective and strong-minded. (Lan, M, Yr4)

While Lan identifies himself as independent and self-confident; his account reveals his potentiality for autonomous reflexivity before he went to university; on the other hand, he also admits he lacks a sense of obligation to his family, compared with other Chinese young people. He even feels a bit guilty for that; a cultural commitment of taking responsibility for his family is embedded on his mind.

> I should have done something for my family … but I didn't! … I think I started to care about my parents' life when I was in Yr2; that year, my grandparents both passed away. And I knew my parents had their own troubles, although they never let me notice. The next year, my dad's little brother committed suicide. When I came back home, dad talked with me. For the first time, I knew my parents could also be helpless. … It was time for me to shoulder my family. (Lan, M, Yr4)

Not all Chinese parents, however, are likely to be as supportive and democratic as these participants' parents. Fang (F, Yr1) assumes many of her classmates may be not as fortunate as her in communicating with her parents as friends. One of Zhang's (F, Yr1) high school classmates was forced to go to a normal university instead of her ideal university. Zhang pitied her classmate because that classmate was very unhappy and helpless in such a family. In contemporary China, many Chinese parents believe in the conventionally educational tactic of 'spare the rod, spoil the child'; they tend to employ an authoritative parenting style (Chen, 2014; Xu et al., 2005).

This thesis is not a place to provide details about parenting styles in China, but my students' accounts reveal their parents affect them, either in a way of controlling them or supporting them. Whether having 'dominant' or 'democratic' parents, most of my students realised, however, that their relationships with parents or their parents' influences on them would become gradually more distant after going to university. Apart from the physical distance between them, it seems that Chinese parents pay most

attention to their children's study before going to university, which constitutes one of their important obligations to children. After their children go to university, such an obligation to most parents has been completed; parents and children can then finally be relieved of their biggest shared pressure (Gao, 2018; Ma & Jiao, 2019). Perhaps, the relief from this obligation leads to less attention from their parents. Even Jia (F, Yr4), who felt smothered by her parents' over-attention, had sensed this change in the relationship between her and her parents, saying that her parents had paid less attention to her after she came to TU. Instead, they now urged her to tutor her little brother, who was a Grade Three student in high school. She said, 'my mum often let me tutor my little brother and help him to learn English.' (Jia, F, Yr4). Consistent with Jia's accounts, Feng (F, Yr4) and Nan (F, Yr2) found their parents seemed seldom to talk about their study and scores after they went to university. Having two little sisters, Nan noticed her mum transferred much of concern to her sisters.

> When I call her, my mum is always busy, at night in particular, because she is always busy with helping my two little sisters with their homework … (Nan, F, Yr2)

In this respect, Chinese young people can have more space to explore themselves and their own lives after they go to college; such space provides them with the conditions for their personal growth.

4.1.3 *Gaokao* result: an essential condition for coming to TU

Almost every Chinese student going to a Chinese university must go through *Gaokao*, the selection examination. Literally, Chinese mainland college students share one origin or prior identity: being a *Gaokao* candidate. Here, I present my students' accounts of their *Gaokao* experience to illustrate how it can link with their studying in TU and affect their self-knowledge and self-definition.

Briefly, the mission of *Gaokao* is to filter and divide Chinese high school graduates by its cut-off-score. Most students do not actually make their 'free' choices of which university they would like to go to; instead, their *Gaokao* result makes the decision for them. 30 students in my research claim that they came to TU[22] because this university provided them with a fallback option when their *Gaokao* result frustrated their desire for admission to a higher-ranked university. TU was the best possibility for them. Only three participants (Guan, M, Yr3; Wang, M, Yr1; Zhou, F, Yr4) declared they chose TU as their first choice rather than a fallback; they will be discussed later.

Many of the 30 students in my study label themselves as 'a failure' in the *Gaokao* competition because they failed to go to a university on the list of Project 985 or 211, Chinese top universities.

> I did not do well in my *Gaokao*…I have to come here. I guess most of our students came to TU for the same reason as me. (Xu, M, Yr1)

> I thought I would go to Ji'nan University [a Project 211 HEI] before *Gaokao*. I had never thought I could fail. In the end, I had to come here … because I would never choose any second-tier university. (Jia, F, Yr4)

Gaining entry to 985 or 211 universities seems to be many Chinese students' goal in going to high school, but competition for access to these universities is cruel because among the 2663 HEIs in China, there are only 35 Project 985 universities and 112 Project 211 (MoE, 2019). Admission to a 985 or 211 university or a *Gaokao* result which exceeds the cut-off-score of these universities are then regarded as a form of symbolic capital to Chinese students. A good *Gaokao* result is taken as certifying many good qualities of a student, such as intelligence, diligence and knowledgeableness. Students going to higher ranking universities, to *Qinghua* or Peking University in particular, or those whose *Gaokao* scores are good enough to let them go

[22] TU admits students in the same way with Chinese state-universities, through *Gaokao*. Not all TNHEIs depends on the *Gaokao* system in their student enrollment (see TU website; other TNHEIs' websites).

to these universities, are admired as a 'success', and will anticipate success in their future career and even marriage (Xie, 2017). Xie observes that graduates from these higher-ranking universities are given wide priorities by Chinese society, compared with those from ordinary colleges (*ibid*).

Among the three participants mentioned earlier with much better *Gaokao* scores (Guan, M, Yr3; Wang, M, Yr1; Zhou, F, Yr4), Zhou emphasised that her scores were good enough to allow her to go to Sun Yat-set University (a Project 985 institute) if she had applied for it. She chose to come to TU instead because of certain exclusive features of TU compared with Chinese state-universities. She had heard about the relative academic freedom at TU, in her major - politics - in particular, and she admired such a freer academic environment, compared with that in many Chinese state-universities. She also had a particular aspiration for her future career.

> I know a sister-learner at TU, an IS major. She is now working in Spain…It is easier for TU graduates to work abroad. (Zhou, F, Yr4)

Guan's and Wang's *Gaokao* results were also excellent, even winning them a tuition-waiver award. In the eyes of people around them, their choice of TU meant a waste of their excellent scores.

> My *Gaokao* result was very good … I could go to a 985 institute … Many people around me did not understand why I came here … they thought I wasted my scores. [But] my parents liked this university and supported me. (Guan, M, Yr3)

In contrast, Wang's parents were not happy with his choice of TU, despite his obtaining tuition-waiver. They thought it was not optimal use of his symbolic capital, but Wang insisted on coming to TU. He persuaded his parents by exaggerating all the possible achievements he might attain. He told me, however, his real reason for desiring an admission to TU was that he came to be with his girlfriend, as TU was her desire. In the meantime,

Wang admitted that if not for her, he would never have chosen any TNHEI because of his family's economic status and he even sighed, 'If I were now studying in a 985 institute, my life would be much smoother than that at TU.' At TU, with his *Gaokao* symbolic capital, Wang had to be cautious when talking with his roommates, for the fear that he might be marginalised by them.

> When I started an academic-related topic in the dorm, I was teased by my roommates. Perhaps they thought I showed off my academic capacities because my *Gaokao* result is much better than theirs. (Wang, M, Yr1)

Some students are convinced that the *Gaokao* result provides a measure of their learning capacities and determines their future academic trajectory.

> My *Gaokao* scores could only make me study here. (Shen, F, Yr4).

> *Gaokao* scores can reflect our academic capacities and cognitive abilities. We are a group of students between excellent students in high ranking state universities and those in other state universities. (Bai, M, Yr4)

With a similar view, Jia (F, Yr4) pitied herself for her better *Gaokao* scores and higher academic capability than many other students enrolled in the same year at TU. She even looked down upon TU when she first came to TU, simply because of its relatively lower *Gaokao* cut-off-score. She admitted she socially withdrew herself from many TU students and kept contact with only a few.

Their *Gaokao* result, to some extent, also decided what my participants were going to study. Some students chose their current major just because it was the one that they could get with their *Gaokao* result. In other words, this major was their 'best' possibility rather than their real interest.

> I chose FAM, because it had the highest admission line in our university that year when I came. … so, I wouldn't feel that I wasted too much of my scores. (Guan, Yr3, M)

> The options filled in my application form totally depended on whether my *Gaokao* scores reached the cut-off-score of these. (Nan, F, Yr2)

> I was put in IS because I failed to go to the School of Business, my first choice at TU. (Yi, M, Yr2)

In contrast, Lan (M, Yr4) is one who acknowledges that he chose to study his major out of his own interest.

> I have paid attention to this university for a long time. When I failed in my *Gaokao*, I decided not to retake it anymore because the process is too suffering. Then, I chose this university. … I was an Arts student in high school. I could choose business, which most students study, but I really didn't like it. I am not fond of studying, so if I chose a major I had little interest in, I don't think I could survive from learning that. IS was the only major subject I felt I was interested in, so I chose it. (Lan, M, Yr4)

As Lan said, 'Business' seems to be one of the most popular choices amongst Chinese students and their parents (Sohu.com, 2016, 2018). With the continuous university enrolment expansion, by 2019, the number of graduates in China as a whole had risen to 8.34 million and, as a result, the employment situation for many of these graduates is not optimistic (MoE, 2019). In this respect, selecting a prospective major in university constitutes a mission for parents and students (Gaokao.eol.cn, 2017; People. cn, 2013). Although the mass media appeal to parents to take their offspring's interest into account when selecting major subjects (e.g. People.cn, 2013; Xinhuanet, 2018), in fact, these suggestions seem not to work well. Some parents insist that studying Business is the correct choice, irrespective of the students' own interest or opinion (*ibid*). A survey presented that 42.65% of participants from among the 2016 new undergraduates in China said they

obeyed their parents' expectations in selecting their present major subjects (Gaokao.eol.cn, 2017). Shen's father, as an illustration of this, provided this remark on students' own interests:

> My father thought mastering skills for living in the future in university was far more important than following my own interests, because he thought I could seek and develop what I was really fond of later after I graduated from this university. (Shen, F, Yr4)

Whether they had come to TU for their own interests or whether they were 'obligated' to come by their *Gaokao* score, my students all tended to use the word 'chose/decided', 'I decided to come here.' or 'I chose here with my parents' help.' This can support a growing sense of their 'self' as independent of parents. They believe it is their agency that determines their life choices and designs their life project; their parents' advice and helps –the structure – are the conditions they can make use of. Wei's comments, however, remind us that the interactions between agency and structure cannot be depicted as which decides which or which is independent of which.

> I am not interested in IBE, which I am studying now… if I could choose, I would study arts and music, but I know I will never do so because being a singer was not a decent job in people's eyes. And because it is not a stable job, I will be taking a risk with my future life. … Recently, I am thinking how strongly the influences from the society have been exerted on us. Often, we are not sure whether our choice is really our choice or just the expectation of the society. We are used to being involved in it and lose the sense to distinguish it. (Wei, Yr4, M)

4.2 Lifelines at TU

Many of my students were of the opinion that, after enrolling at TU, they all follow similar paths along the 'tube'. According to them, TU students' journeys start from a period (the first year) similar to a precollege session,

when their courses are mainly related to the basic English skills that will be needed for successfully negotiating English medium courses. Then, they will start to focus more on their majors at the second year. Apart from academic courses, most of them will take part in various extracurricular activities at Yr1 and Yr2, such as internships and volunteer programmes, or other activities and programmes organised by a large range of Student Societies at TU. At Yr3 and Yr4, they will mainly focus on preparing for their graduation and further study. When they graduate, the majority of them will go on with a master's study in an overseas university (84.3% of Class 2019 Chinese mainland graduates); some will start to work (11.4%) or make other decisions (4.3%). The description above is easily found on TU's website (TU, 2019) or other social media platforms (e.g. WeChat) introducing study and life there.

These similarities in their life at TU arise probably because TU students will be influenced by the social structures within which this university operates, as the structure-dominant mode of college student develop proposes and describes (see section 2.1.2); their parents' expectations, their previous learning dispositions as well as the current employment situation in China all constantly remind them to do the 'correct' things in university, such as to earn their human capital – the British diploma. This life pattern at TU has become a certain intangible influence imprinted in many students' minds. Bai's remark facilitates an understanding of this similarity in TU students' agendas for their university lives:

> There is a norm in this university that 'new' students tend to consult 'old' students about almost anything at TU. (Bai, M, Yr4)

Lv (F, Yr2) said that when she first came to TU, depending on advice about 'dos and don'ts' for students at different years of study from senior students, she set out a detailed plan for her university days, listing annual tasks such as preparing for IELTS, and participating in volunteer and internship

programmes. Her parents also actively helped to propose her agenda by seeking advice from various people.

Lu realised that most students at TU had a clear awareness of what they should do in each year of study:

> [We] know that we should study hard in Yr2 because whether we could exchange in the UK campus is dependent on our Yr2 credits; at Yr3, we also do our best to get better scores, because our academic transcripts decide where we could be enrolled to do a Master's degree. … While, the focus at Yr1 is the attendance of various Student Societies… (Lu, F, Yr3)

Accounts from other students, for example, Chu (M, Yr3), Guan (M, Yr3), Wei (M, Yr4), Shan (F, Yr1), Yuan (F, Yr3), are consistent with Lu's statement; and the researcher's own observations further confirm them. Advertisement of IELTS training and various advisory services for future study or career are regularly found in the school emails to advise students how they should prepare for and schedule their study in TU. Conversations with some 'non-informants' often show their plans to follow their brother/sister learners, and their ambitions to succeed in TU as the senior TU students do.

For most students, the destination of this journey at TU means the start of a new adventure - to study abroad for a master's degree. Tan (F, Yr1), Xu (M, Yr1), Ying (F, Yr1) all mentioned this plan. Some students explained that studying abroad after obtaining their undergraduate degree from TU was imperative for most TU-goers. They regarded they had failed in their *Gaokao* but would well prepare for their further study. This was one reason why they came there in the first place (Nan, M, Yr2; Xing, M, Yr2); Sun (F, Yr1) asserted that, otherwise, there was no point studying at TU.

To students, going to university does not only mean spending a period of their lives studying some subjects in a specific place. Time spent in 'the tube'

should not be simply interpreted by analogy with the process of ageing; instead, 'the tube' should provide a stage for these young people to explore possibilities for their life trajectories and facilitate their 'self-formation' (Marginson, 2014, p.6). Marginson suggests that students in universities can not only improve their knowledge but also develop their identity; rather, he argues they should be given more space to grow up in a way decided by their personal agency (*ibid*). Students' life trajectory cannot and should not be pre-designed for them, however perfect the design might be felt to be. Rather, all normative models of university experience (see sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2) and its influence must firstly be examined at the level of those norms explicitly stated, and secondly at the empirical level of actual effects.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005[1991]) portray an idealised life trajectory based on their review of American college students in the research literature in the 1990s. They say young people will evolve:

> from cognitive and affective simplicity to complexity, from personal non-responsibility to responsibility, from dependence through autonomy to independence, from impulsiveness to self-control…. from external controls to internal controls and self-determination, from self-interestedness to a sense of fairness and responsibility for others… (p.48).

College students' personal growth and changes while at university, however, may not be easy to predict, because of the dynamics of the university environment and every student's evolving characteristics. As Strange and Banning (2001, cited by Strange, 2003, p.299) write, a campus is not only a physical structure where students are staying and studying in arranged buildings. It also comprises an organisational structure that 'serve[s] specific goals' (Strange, 2003, p.299), such as setting rules and objectives. Such a dynamic context of university facilitates college students, as emerging adults, to continuously changing and growing in multiple respects – cognitively, socially, and emotionally. In this respect, time spent in university is not simply a time of growing older.

Returning to my students, the blue lines (see Figure 4.1) to the left are intended to illustrate their life trajectories ('lifelines') before going to college; they show diversity in origins but are brought together - or 'focused' - by the *Gaokao* as I discussed earlier. They came to TU with their previous dispositions in learning and living and with an expectation to experience a promised 'real' British education. They are the 'post-90s generation'. Chen described himself but at the same time gave himself a role as representative of this generation:

> I don't lack self-confidence. So do our generation. [We are] far braver. We dare to dream and dare to do. (Chen, M, Yr1)

Chu (M, Yr3) remarked that contemporary college students should have a variety of objectives and live 'dynamic' lives. In the process of striving to meet these objectives, they may develop in different ways and in different directions, thereby taking divergent paths on emerging from TU. Thus, they could evolve from 'studying machines' to 'human beings'.

Some students noted that this British university particularly contributed to their desire to 'be themselves', compared with many traditional[23] Chinese universities. Ma (M, Yr3) sighed that his former classmates were just like they were in high school - only interested in completing their academic assignments and getting higher results. Guan (M, Yr3) even affirmed that lives in many traditional universities were like going on experiencing the same lifestyle as that in high school: they continue to devote themselves to almost nothing but examinations. Their accounts resonate with Cen's (2017) work about Chinese students' living experiences in Chinese universities. She argues that for some students 'college is merely another four years of schooling after high school' (p.130). A difference shown by my students is

[23] Other universities in China apart from the Sino-foreign cooperatively running universities are commonly called 'traditional universities' by my students. In my thesis, therefore, I shall reflect this, and the term 'traditional universities' is employed to refer to other Chinese state-run universities.

that they valued the learning experiences and environment at TU as contributing to their self-development.

4.2.1 Key notions and terminologies

In the accounts of my students, some concepts and terms appeared repeatedly. It is important to understand these from their point of view when presenting their life trajectories in TU and analysing the process of their personal growth.

TU: 'A costly university' and for 'students from rich families'?

Several participants held a similar view that TU was publicly regarded as 'a costly university' (贵族学校 *guizu xuexiao*, an exclusive school) and students there are those rich second generation (富二代 *fuerdai*, children from very rich families) (e.g. Lan, M, Yr4; Jia, F, Yr4; Shan, F, Yr1; Wei, M, Yr4; Zheng, M, Yr3).

In Chinese discursive contexts, these two labels have negative connotations, which may have compounded the students' negative evaluations of themselves as '*Gaokao* failures' when they first came. After arriving, the public perception of TU as an 'exclusive' university was confirmed. Perhaps as a personal defensive response or a necessary change to allow them to continue, however, especially after comparing themselves with 'successful' former classmates who entered 985/211 universities, my students quickly began to identify positive aspects of TU and were to have these more widely known (see Appendix VI TU students' response to a misuse of TU's name in a Chinese language TV drama). For example, Shan admitted,

> Before coming here, I thought this university is an exclusive university. Only its name sounds very costly. … When I started to know this university, I think it is worth the money … see our beautiful and clean campus and other facilities… (Shan, F, Yr1)

Some participants regarded the higher tuition as a filter to ensure only a specific group of students with certain socioeconomic status and family capitals can enter this university. They defined such a group as being 'middle-class' (e.g. Bai, M, Yr4; Chu, M, Yr3; Lan, M, Yr4; Ou, M, Yr4; Rong, M, Yr3; Yue, M, Yr1). Additionally, Bai maintained that students' family statuses can reflect their *suzhi* (素质 good moral qualities). He put it this way,

> Although it is not the only determinate factor, many students' *suzhi* reflects their family background. Our campus is very safe, for students mainly come from relatively wealthier families. For example, theft or fighting is seldom found in our university, compared with some other universities in China. (Bai, M, Yr4)

Consistent with Bai's statement, Lan (M, Yr4) and Chu (M, Yr3) considered it was students' family background that had moulded their present traits before they came into TU. Rong also emphasised the importance of a family's socioeconomic status and the environment it offered for students' 'growing up'. He argued that it was easy for students to make friends and got along well with those from a similar background. Because the tuition of TU is much higher than that of traditional Chinese universities, as a filter, it will keep some students whose family cannot afford to pay for the fee out of TU. Thus, Rong claimed most of his *tongxue* (classmates/schoolmates) in TU must have a similar family background with him and he regarded himself as fortunate to study at TU and make good friends here.

> I never mean to look down upon anyone, but there is a huge gap between us and many other students in traditional universities in China. … One of my relatives told me she could not go out for dinner with her roommates because they were not willing to split dinner bills. They seemed not to afford a 40-50 RMB meal per person. … I cannot image studying in that university, surrounded with those people. I think I can never make friends in her university because our values are different. (Rong, M, Yr3)

TU context and TU mainstream culture

These two terms emerged in many students' accounts. In most participants' depictions, TU context is a physical and cultural environment. Wei (M, Yr4) provided an insightful description of the TU context and mainstream culture, which includes the students themselves at TU. It is their presence as part of the 'environment' that helps to ensure the continuity of the TU cultural environment.

> TU context consists of a British educational system, the pedagogy, the branding of the university and the Chinese students involved in it. These students with their parents' socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds are eager and able to do what this university designs for them and expects them to do. All these conditions contribute to today's TU context and the mainstream culture of TU. Then, TU continues to attract the attention of more Chinese students who are interested in this kind of context and culture. (Wei, M, Yr4)

In this research, the mainstream culture in the TU context as identified by my participants involves freedom, *shua ye*(刷夜), student societies, volunteer programmes, preparation for an overseas further study and 'exchange in the UK' (see details in section 4.2.2).

The mainstream TUers

In common with many of my participants and the TU website, I shall refer to my students as TUers (see footnote 14, p.123). One participant, Yue (M, Yr1), however, divided TUers into the 'mainstream' and 'non-mainstream'. Yue said he and some of his brother and sister learners at TU identified there were a larger group of Chinese students who were the mainstream TUers – those who embraced the mainstream TU culture willingly and without questioning it. Yue defined himself and these brother/sister learners as the non-mainstream. He claimed there must be many non-mainstream TUers like them, but he felt they were probably voiceless and possibly ignored by

the mainstream. Because of his self-definition as 'a non-mainstream TU student', Yue (M, Yr1) liked to use 'others' when mentioning the majority of TU Chinese students. For example, Yue said: 'If my objection against the TU cultures goes public, I will be judged by others.'

In contrast to the non-mainstream, the mainstream did not deny a sense of a 'collective identity' as TUers. Rather, they tended to use 'we/us/our' to indicate their sense of belonging to TU and being TUers. For example,

> **Our** Iweek leader was great. (Shen, F, Yr4)
>
> **Our** university provides a variety of social activities with **us** students. **We** don't have any reason not to enjoy them. (Zhou, F, Yr4)
>
> **Our** university creates a distinguished environment for **us**, for example, all these modern facilities. … **Our** sister learners are very beautiful and fashion. (Ning, F, Yr1)

This sense of belonging at TU also triggered their conscious otherization of their previous self – as students in Chinese educational system – and their former classmates – as college students in traditional universities, and an emphasis on their own uniqueness as TUers. For example, after comparing her life with her former classmates' university lives and confirming that TU lifestyle was much freer than that in traditional universities, He claimed,

> **Their** university lives are not that good; I prefer life in **our** university because of the freedom we have'. (He, F, Yr1)

Similarly, Song reported,

> **We** are lucky compared with students in traditional Chinese universities. **Our** university will organise various information sessions to provide useful materials for students, for example, to select courses or create CV. But they often complain they don't get any effective support from their universities

> when they need to make decisions, such as when selecting courses to learn. (Song, F, Yr3)

Some participants accepted being referred to as 'TUers' but did not differentiated a mainstream/non-mainstream division. Nevertheless, their accounts presented their acceptance of the mainstream TU culture was not totally uncritical. Six of them in particular (Hua, M, Yr2; Jia, F, Yr4; Lv, F, Yr2; Nan, F, Yr2; Wei, M, Yr4; Yi, M, Yr2) reported their strong desire to live a different university life from their peers' at TU and had clear intentions to construct their ideal self within the TU environment (although it was described in similar terms to those used by the 'mainstream' TUers). For example, Wei (M, Yr4) realised 'everyone is a unique existence' and he could not totally copy others' lives. Rather, he must explore what life he wanted to live and who he wanted to become independently. Wei claimed that 'some brother/sister learners at TU tend to exaggerate TUers' overall academic achievements and the graduates of TU tend to exaggerate TUers' overall employabilities'. He maintained that both capacities and achievements were personal and individual because 'you are the only one who knows what you really want and who you really are'. Wei was himself happy not to be influenced by others.

> I also tried to imitate these successful brother/sister learners, but I gradually found their lifestyle did not fit me. Then I constantly tried new ways and I think I finally have found my own lifestyle. I am living a life that I enjoy at TU. (Wei, M, Yr4)

'TUer' is a complex idea in my research because my participants conceptualised it in various ways, which will be elaborated in the next chapter.

Iweek (Induction Week)

Open to all newly come students, Iweek seems to be the first important student activity in my participants' university life. They all took part in their

Iweek when they first came to TU. Some Yr2-4 students also recalled their second attendance at Iweek as team leaders (e.g. Guan, M, Yr3; Lan, M, Yr4; Ma, M, Yr3). They pointed out that the purpose for organising Iweek is to introduce 'the dispositions [the senior students] have learned' to newcomers, including academic (e.g. Guan, M, Yr3), leisure (e.g. Lan, M, Yr4) and participation in various Student Societies (e.g. Ma, M, Yr3). For newcomers to TU, Iweek helped them to adapt to the transitional period from high school to university and thus deeply impressed them. Iweek played a key role in my students' acculturation in TU. Shan (F, Yr1) said the members she met during Iweek at TU relieved her from 'loneliness'. In retrospect, Zhou (F, Yr4) evaluated Iweek highly, saying 'that week in my Yr1 was great, helping me adapt to university life immediately'.

As one 'brother learner', Lan (M, Yr4) had shared his experiences and 'tricks' with Yr1 students during Iweek. He noted,

> When I led one Iweek, I introduced *the TU way of life*, such as how we study and how we play, to Yr1 students. I think it's the meaning of Iweek and the obligation of being brother/sister learners. (Lan, M, Yr4)

Other participants, such as Chu (M, Yr3), Hua (M, Yr2), Lv (F, Yr2), Jiang (M, Yr4) and Ma (M, Yr3), as brother/sister learners, had also delivered speeches to the newcomers and shared their experiences of 'how to live as a TUer'.

4.2.2 Life at TU

It was after experiencing Iweek that my students reported they started to get involved in TU. They figured out some 'key concepts' in the mainstream TU culture: 'freedom', '*shua ye*', 'Student Societies', 'volunteer programmes', 'preparation for an overseas further study', 'exchange in the UK'. These key concepts and activities play significant roles in their identity formation processes.

Free/Free Time/Freedom

'Free/free time/freedom' appears in almost every participant's interview accounts. It is regarded as an essential part of the TU mainstream culture and TU lifestyle. Lu (F, Yr3) realised there was a TU lifestyle and described it as 'freedom and being yourself'. The initial reaction by many to 'freedom' in TU is quite similar: it is a celebration of their independence. Zhou (F, Yr4) recalled: 'I love this free lifestyle at TU the moment I first came into this university'.

Some Yr1 participants in particular expressed their sudden and joyful change to having such freedom at TU. For example,

> Of course, I prefer our free lifestyle in this university. In high school, we were controlled by our teachers every day. We must comply with our academic schedules operated by the school. For example, during a self-study session, we must do what the teacher assigned us to do but were not allowed to do anything else. Just like taking an exam, we must do it during this period. But I love learning freely. (Sun, F, Yr1)

'Learning/study' to Chinese students means mainly academic study and grabbing more marks (Liu & Xu, 2020). Sun felt at TU she could do something else rather than spend all time on her academic study and scores. This was a key meaning of freedom to her, which is contrasted to her previous schooling experiences. Others also felt they could finally choose what they would like to study and play, rather than following instructions. Shan (F, Yr1) and Guo (M, Yr1) noted they were happy to have much free time in their university lives. Shan spent it doing things she was truly interested in, such as playing music or watching movies. Guo was happy that he could have some time for his own hobbies. He said: 'In here, we will never be forced to do the endless homework. … I can finally do things I like.'

Shua ye and Student Societies participation

Shua ye (刷夜), a buzz word amongst contemporary Chinese university students, means staying up late at night or staying out at night (see Baidu.com). 'Freedom' at TU brings students 'no curfew in the dorms' (Tan, F, Yr1), a pointed noted by many first-year students in particular. Thus, TU students could *shua ye*[24] in their dorms or 'hang out' with peers at night without worrying about being locked out of their dorms as their counterparts in traditional Chinese universities would find if they failed to return by curfew time. TU provides students with condition for *shua ye*.

To my students, *shua ye* at TU must have a good reason such as for academic study or working for student societies they have joined in. *Shua ye*, however, is not put together with 'freedom' for the reason that most of my participants declared they almost only *shua ye* for completing their work rather than playing freely.

Tan noticed that as the 'main workforce[25] of TU Student Societies', most Yr1 students often stayed up late to work on the 'jobs' assigned by their leaders in different student societies. Yue (M, Yr1) mentioned, apart from *shua ye* in students' dorms, Yr1 students also mingled and *shua ye* in the atrium of TU's teaching building for discussing and doing these 'jobs'. My first interview with Yue nearly two months after he came to TU occurred in the atrium. During the interview, Yue pointed out to me those Yr1 students he could recognise working for their student societies. He held a view that although they had only been at TU for two months, these Yr1 students (his peers) had already become the embodiments of the TU culture, *shua ye* culture in particular.

[24] Commonly in Chinese, the same word can be used as noun or verb, as here.

[25] Tan used 'workforce' to define Yr1 members in Student Societies in TU. She treated her work in student societies as a real job.

Lv (F, Yr2) introduced another type of *shua ye*, named 'academic *shua ye*'. As its name suggests, it refers to staying up late at night for an academic purpose. Having no curfew in student dorms at TU contributes to the fulfillment of 'academic *shua ye'* amongst TU students. It is difficult for Chinese students in traditional universities in China to do this, however. Chen reported,

> I've heard that other universities will cut off electricity, water and WIFI in student dorms after 10 pm. Those students cannot do reading or anything else at night in their dorms. It is very inconvenient. (Chen, M, Yr1)

In this respect*, shua ye* seems to refer to a specific characteristic of TUers in my participants' eyes. Interestingly, when my participants used the term *shua ye*, they connoted its 'good' sides only. Some students, Yr1 in particular, also mentioned the absence of a curfew in TU shocked them and made them lose control of their life and disturbed their previous living habits. These participants, however, blamed their non-adjustment to having much freedom in their non-academic life in TU but not *shua ye* culture, because TU students *shua ye* for a valid reason – either for an academic purpose or for their student societies.

Volunteer and overseas exchange programme participation

Participating in volunteer programmes, preparing for overseas exchange programmes and further study for a master's degree are regarded as other characteristics of being TUers; these are considered as TUers' routines. According to my students' accounts, TU students will usually take part in volunteer programmes in Yr1 and Yr2 and focus on prepare for an overseas exchange programme in Yr2 and Yr3.

Eight Yr1 students expressed their ambitions to attend such programmes. They scheduled participation in volunteer programmes for various reasons. Shan (F) thought it would be 'a good opportunity to experience a different life'. Zhu (M) depicted the time spending on a volunteer participation as 'a

period to step out of one's comfort zone'. Xu (M) said he would be happy if he knew his participation was helpful to others. More said they would like to take part in overseas volunteer programmes just because others did so.

Ten Yr2-4 participants told me about their overseas volunteering experiences. For them, taking part in overseas volunteer programmes was part of a fashionable lifestyle. Their work in the programmes was 'very easy' (Nan, F, Yr2) and their participation was even alike to 'travelling' (Chu, M, Yr3). As Lan (M, Yr4) even admitted, participating in student volunteer programmes was actually more beneficial to students rather than those they aimed to serve, although most student volunteers' initial purpose was to help others who were in need. He himself later opened up an agency to organise overseas volunteer programmes with one of his brother learners, inspired by the volunteer programme he took part in.

> We have found an increasing number of students, at least in our university, would like to pay money for joining in overseas volunteer programmes. Then, we thought why not to open an agency of ours. (Lan, M, Yr4)

Lv (F, Yr2) noted she started to plan her university life from her Yr1. Participating in the volunteer programme should be in her Yr1 agenda and preparing for an exchange programme should be in Yr2. She indeed acted according to her agenda. When I interviewed her, she had started to prepare for her one-year exchange in Germany for her Yr3 study. Other Yr2 participants (e.g. Cai, M; Nan, F; Yi, M) had similar plans. They had completed taking part in a volunteer programmer in their Yr1 and also planned to exchange in an overseas university in their Yr3. These Yr2 participants thought in Yr4 they would not need to place much academic stress on themselves if they worked hard enough in Yr3 and attained enough credits but should mainly focus on applying for their overseas master's degree. The Yr4 participants' accounts underpinned this claim (e.g. Feng, F; Jia, F; Shen, F).

Chapter V Who do my participants think they are?

This chapter presents and discusses data on my students' growth and identity evolution at TU. Although these data are not representative of all Chinese students in TNHEIs in China, they can shed light on the complexity of individual development and identity formation and provide responses to some concerns and worries about TNHE education in China from the public and some Chinese scholars as I discussed in Chapter I (see pp.3-5).

5.1 Overview of students' perceptions of their identity formation

I always kept in mind during my entire research that I would not provide pre-designed categories of identity to my participants nor lead them to fit themselves in or be fitted into such categories; therefore, I deliberately avoided asking direct identity-related questions such as 'Who are you?' or 'What do you think "being a student of TU" means?'. My students were not pushed to answer my questions just for me to complete my research, but they could talk to me freely about their lives, feelings and attitudes towards their surroundings at TU. In doing this, I found my students reflected themselves in identification and categorisation of 'me/we and they/others' whether consciously or sub-consciously. According to their accounts, their self/identity reflects in a mirror called 'others'. Figure 5.1 illustrates this process.

Since my participants' identity at TU was formed through a process of differentiation of 'I think I(we) am(are)…' and 'I think they[26] are…' in which my participants accomplished their self-reflection and recognised their own identity, I will present their identities in the way they led me to follow rather than in referring to any classical model of identity, such as the Eriksonian stage model. Although I could not ensure that my participants' identity

[26] 'They' mainly refers to the participant's *tongxue* (classmates/schoolmates) and roommates, with whom the participant often had connections with.

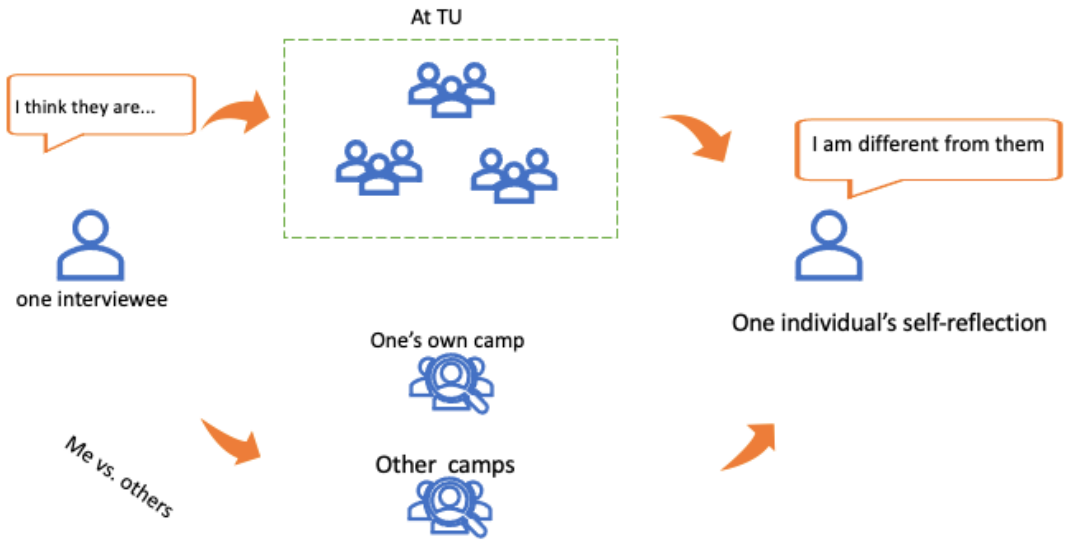

Figure 5.1 Map of how my students perceive their identity formation

formation illustrated in this way is more authentic than that reflected in 'given' identity models or not, my participants at least could supply their thoughts and perceptions of 'the self' and 'the others' at TU from their own perspectives to me and other outsiders to their lives with the minimum of outsider intervention. This encourages greater authenticity of their accounts that can be used to identify the 'self' that is the source of these accounts. In this way, my thesis can contribute to another approach to seeking and understanding college students' identity and its formation from students' own perspectives, thereby facilitating a good understanding of self-perception of college student at TU.

It is worth mentioning that, in the first place, what facilitated my participants' self-exploration was their 'subjective objectivity' towards others. Their interview accounts reveal their views and attitudes towards the TU context and others' lives at TU based on their observations and experiences. My students regarded these observations and experiences as 'objective to them', but they are necessarily perceived to be subjective to the student described by them. Nevertheless, my participants' identity at TU was constructed in this way. My position in reporting my participants' identity development in this thesis is similar. Although my intention is to let my students report 'I think I am…' rather than to report my perceptions of who they are, this

thesis has to be presented through me because it is impossible to separate 'me' from the thesis itself, since I designed, conducted and analysed all of the interviews and wrote this report (see section 3.2.3).

The second point to be justified is that seeking one's identity and reflecting one's identity in others/others' identity is not impossible; it is rather common in our daily lives. When we are thinking of who we are, we tend to self-categorise first and check which group we can belong to or not and then complete the identification of 'who I am'. This process fits with Burke and Stets' identity theory. As I early discussed (see pp.25-26, section 2.1.3), they (2009) argue that the basic concepts of 'group' and 'person', symbolising the concepts of 'social identity' and 'self-identity' respectively, cannot be disentangled in the process of identity formation, because they could never exist without the prerequisite of each other. In this respect, although my students think they mainly picture students at TU as a panorama and only clarify characteristics of their *tongxue*, their 'self' reflects in their expressions in the way of 'we are…' (including the self) or 'they are…' (excluding the self).

5.2 Four perceptions of who they think they are

Four broad perceptions regarding who my students think they are *becoming* at TU emerge from their accounts and will be discussed in this sub-section. Each perception represents one sub-group of my students holding similar views; it also reflects how students of this sub-group perceive TU students' identity and formation. These perceptions are: 1) 'We can think in a Westernised style in academic [contexts] while we are still Chinese in daily life.' (Ou, M, Yr4); 2) 'Am I a half *wai guo ren* (外国人, foreigner)?... [Then, I can] 'hang out' very late and enjoy my night life like them?' (Wang, M, Yr1); 3) 'We are treated as individual human beings at TU.' (Xing, M, Yr2); and 4) 'We are all "*foreigners*"'. (Kong, F, alumna)

In order not to hinder the reader's understanding of my participants' identity formation, in this sub-section, I reduce my subjective interpretations and present the students' own voices as much as possible to maximise the authenticity of the information supplied by my students. My own analysis will mainly appear in section 5.3 and Chapter VI.

5.2.1 Perception one – 'We can think in a Westernised style in academic contexts while we are still Chinese in daily life.'

The students of this sub-group are aware of the existence of a sharp boundary between their academic and non-academic lives. Their accounts implied that the two aspects of their lives are independent from each other. They noticed TU students are half British/Western in academic activities and half Chinese in daily life, because TU provides a 'British-style' education but is located in a Chinese city. In this respect, these students maintain that TUers are learning to adapt to and practice a British learning style, as British students do inside classrooms because all teaching and examinations are conducted in English. This is also their expectation of TU – to experience a 'real' British education. After class, Chinese students often 'hang out' with Chinese *tongxue* and speak in Chinese. They return to a Chinese context and behave as a Chinese student in that context.

Student Xu expressed it in this way:

> Everything related to teaching in this university is British; everything outside classroom retains Chinese [he means language and style] … because most tutors are Westerners. They teach us based on British pedagogies and syllabus. Their way of thinking is British, and they motivate students to think in this Western way as well. (Xu, M, Yr1)

He would like to integrate himself into British learning dispositions as soon as possible because,

> I have been learning in Chinese learning styles for over ten years. It is time to change and experience a different style. (Xu, M, Yr1)

And Xu had soon become 'the speaking-up one' in his class, as he expected.

> It was not easy at first because my English was not good; and my classmates stared at me when I spoke up in the classroom. Now I am used to [being the speaking-up one]. And my classmates are also used to this. If one day I didn't speak up, they would feel odd. (Xu, M, Yr1)

Similarly to Xu, Guo (M, Yr1) asserts that Yr1 TUers would be equipped with Westernised learning styles soon because 'all tutors are British in Yr1 in CELE[27]'. He was also satisfied with this British learning and teaching style in Yr1.

> I like independent learning and dislike the Chinese style of infusion education. … One former high school classmate of mine in a super-good Chinese university told me he has to attend the compulsory 'self-study' sessions every night. I hate that. … Now at TU, I can learn what I wish after class rather than being forced to do things I don't like. … Fortunately, I didn't go to the university my father recommended …[otherwise] I would feel very upset by being pushed to do what my former classmates are doing. (Guo, M, Yr1)

In the meantime, Guo was a bit worried about whether he would become less Westernised in academic matters from Yr2 onwards because he had heard that after Yr1 'more Chinese tutors will get involved in the teaching'. Owing to his not being available for a follow-up interview in his Yr2, it was unable to explore whether Guo (M, Yr1) would lose some of the Westernised learning dispositions learned in his Yr1 at TU but increase or re-habituate to some Chinese learning habits when he attended more Chinese tutors' lessons. His anticipation or worries, however, are not underpinned in the

[27] CELE at TU refers to 'Centre for English Language Education'.

accounts of my senior participants of this sub-group (e.g. Lv, F, Yr2; Jiang, F, Yr4; Rong, M, Yr3; Yuan, F, Yr3). They all reported their British learned learning dispositions had been retained rather than reduced even when they attended Chinese teachers' classes.

Yuan claimed her academic half was British for a similar reason that '[teaching] is in the charge of the British university', while the other half in daily life remained Chinese because the whole student residence was under the management of a Chinese higher education institute. Additionally, she maintained that the academic half plays a dominant role in the entire university life of Chinese students. She talked more about her academic half and self-identified she had not become 'British' in her daily life. Yuan used 'open' to refer to this 'Britishness'.

> I have become more open, especially in this semester [her Yr3]. I dare to make mistakes at class…Our tutors always encourage us by sharing their stories of learning Chinese to inspire us not to be afraid of making mistakes in practicing English. Only in this way can we learn English well. I believe in my tutors. … I think it is the TU [academic] context that exerts huge influence on me. (Yuan, F, Yr3)

When it came to her daily life, for example, her concept of friendship, Yuan's 'openness' appears not to be demonstrated. Yuan noted it was difficult to make good friends with students from different cultural backgrounds from hers because of the hurdles of the previous learned dispositions in one's living styles. To her, outside the classrooms, Chinese students remain Chinese and *waiguo* (foreign) students remain *waiguo*.

She gave an example of *mianzi* (face) [28] to explain the differences in daily life between Chinese and Western students at TU.

[28] *Mianzi* also emerges in some other participants' accounts. For example, resonating with Yuan's above comments, Lu (F, Yr2) stated: 'Saving *mianzi* is common in Chinese students' life while *waiguo* students seem to be less concerned with *mianzi*.'. Zheng (M, Yr3) said: 'I think many students don't want to lose *mianzi*. But I don't care about others' judgement.'

> I find everyone [Chinese students] pays much attention to saving *mianzi*. They show the best of themselves to others. Most girls wear make-up to show their beauty. We don't change much even at TU. *Waiguo* students may not pay much attention to this. (Yuan, F, Yr3)

Lv (F, Yr2) concluded that 'where there are *waiguoren* (foreigners) at TU, there is a British prominence in this university'. *Waiguoren* around her at TU were only her tutors, whom she mostly met inside classrooms; she had no *waiguo* classmates and little social connection with *waiguo* students outside the classroom. Even in some student activities operated cooperatively with *waiguo* students, she noticed that when the international students were in the minority (which they are on most occasions outside the classroom) the instrumental language used was often Chinese, for reasons of convenience. Thus, to her, the 'British prominence' existed only inside classrooms; it influenced her way of thinking and changed her to be more '*waiguo*' in academic activities.

> In Yr1, I learned the skills to undertake critical thinking…I knew authority was not equal to the truth, but only represented certain views. …In my essays, I dared to write anything I wanted without worrying about being criticised. This is where I think TU is *waiguo*, so do the students. (Lv, F, Yr2)

Crossing the line

Although Lv insisted that the 'British prominence' only existed in students' academic life, there may have been some changes in her personal traits. She herself did not seem to be aware of these changes but they were noticed by her parents.

> When I came home in the first winter vocation, my parents met me and remarked that I was not like a Chinese student in some way. (Lv, F, Yr2)

Her account indicated that British academic styles formed in the classroom may cross the boundary of academic and non-academic lives, initially inconspicuously to the 'self', but influencing students' daily lives. More examples are found. Jiang's accounts about her two internships – one was in a local government office and the other was in a small foreign firm - revealed that her academic British half had influenced the other half of her 'self' in non-academic life and facilitated an easier adaptation to a Westernised working environment than a local one.

> The boundary between 'superiors' and 'subordinates' is not sharp in this small firm compared with that in my first internship. … I was moved by a tiny thing. Once they prepared a surprise birthday cake for a cleaning lady. I felt they treated everyone equally. … They trusted me, just an intern, and I could freely express my thoughts. They respected my thoughts.… (Jiang, F, Yr4)

Jiang maintains that TU students are not those traditionally obedient Chinese students recorded in much research literature anymore. They are always encouraged to speak up and are seldom treated as inferiors by tutors in the classrooms; what they have learned in the classrooms helped them to get used to arguing and fighting for their own benefits and rights, even with people with higher institutional positions. She values equality and respect in social relationships and freedom of expression in her future workplace. She noted,

> I found I prefer expressing my thoughts now. I may have become Westernised. (Jiang, F, Yr4)

Rong (M, Yr3) also holds the view that TUers are half British academically and half Chinese in their daily lives.

> My learning habits and styles are British. After class, we are Chinese. We speak in Chinese. (Rong, M, Yr3)

Nevertheless, Rong's academic half did benefit his daily life as well as his work during an internship in America.

> When I first arrived in New York, my coworkers asked how long I had been here. I told them nearly a week. And they were surprised. They thought because my English is good, I had been staying in America for a long time. I told them I was studying in an English medium university. … Our opportunity to practice English is only inside the classroom, though. I dared to speak out in English [when in the USA]. (Rong, M, Yr3)

Jiang's and Rong's narratives suggest that one's academic and non-academic lives might not be as clearly split as some students suggested. Instead, the two halves constitute one's self as an entity in some inter-related way.

British academic half → good English speakers?

Rong identifies a link between his good English proficiency and the practice of English inside TU classrooms. Some students of this sub-group share similar views and even assert that their British academic half would guarantee or at least improve their English proficiency just because 'TUers are taught and are learning in fully-English.' (Chen, M, Yr1)

Some Yr1 students (e.g. Fang, F, Yr1; Shi, F, Yr1; Sun, F, Yr1; and Tan, F, Yr1), had high expectations and confidence in gaining a good command in English after spending four years at TU simply. For example,

> I am sure being immersed at TU my English proficiency will be dramatically improved. (Fang, F, Yr1)

And Xu gave a standard of his expected English proficiency.

> I hope I can speak English like a native English speaker. (Xu, M, Yr1)

Additionally, a good command of English should become TUers' symbolic capital compared with other Chinese students, in some of my participants' opinion. They should be better English speakers than their counterparts in Chinese traditional universities.

> Our advantage over other Chinese college students in Chinese universities should be our better English language proficiency. (Sun, F, Yr1)

However, the fact is that improving English skills turned out not to be as easily achieved as they expected. English became more like a beast in the way of some participants' academic trajectory at TU – a beast they have to fight against. Sun notes,

> The teacher speaks English. … I don't understand. … I have to listen to what the teacher is teaching while looking up words I heard in a dictionary. It is very much a torment. (Sun, F, Yr1)

In contrast to these Yr1 participants' optimism, Nan (F, Yr2) said: 'when I was Yr1, I also dreamed my English would become improved as time passed by, but it was not true.' Her English vocabulary even shrank after studying at TU. Nan panicked and sought confirmation from one of her sister learners. She was told that it might be normal for TUers that the fact and their expectations were mismatched.

British academic half → students with critical thinking habitus?

Apart from increasing possibilities to have a good command of English, some participants (e.g. Hua, M, Yr2; Lan, M, Yr4; Shi, F, Yr1) of this sub-group expected to develop a critical thinking habitus in their British academic half. Their confidence was revealed in their accounts. For example,

> We have a course to teach [us] how to do 'critical thinking'. (Zhang, F, Yr1)

> This university does contribute to the formation of critical thinking ability. I find now I am used to saying 'it depends…' when I answer questions asked by our tutors. I know things have dual dimensions. (Shi, F, Yr1)

> This university supplies a multi-dimensional learning environment… I think influences on enhancing our critical thinking skills might well be superior to other [traditional Chinese] universities… I can consider the duality of an issue. (Shan, F, Yr1)

Some participants' understanding of 'critical thinking ability' was mainly reflected in two aspects, 'to be objective' (Zhou, F, Yr4) and 'to dare to challenge authorities' (Zheng, M, Yr3). And they probably practiced this ability from their Yr2, as the following suggest:

> I started to argue with tutors inside the classroom from Yr2. … I seldom participated in classroom activities in Yr1. (Ma, M, Yr3)

> Now (in Yr2)… I don't blindly trust authorities, tutors and science, as I did in Yr1. I gradually find what science tells us is not a 'truth' but is possible ways to explain how the world works. (Hua, M, Yr2)

Lan (M, Yr4) realised that developing 'critical thinking ability' from TU teachings had become one significance of his studying at TU, because he maintained that through 'critical thinking' he could 'think of a variety of views and then make a reasonable choice'. He claimed TU was worth the investment because he had at least obtained the 'critical thinking ability'. When comparing himself with his former high school classmates majoring in a similar subject [29]to his, he even depicted them in a pitying tone.

> Their learnings are only based on one political theory, Marxism, and they venerate it as the truth. … I pity them for their being taught to only believe in this theory. They regard me as the one being brainwashed. … I don't say this

[29] Lan was studying International Studies (IS) when interviewed.

> theory is not correct. But I am saying I should have right to know different views and choose one I believe in from them. (Lan, M, Yr4)

Lan, however, did not only challenge teaching in his former classmates' universities but was also critical about the standards of criticality inside UK university classrooms.

> [When in the exchange programme in the UK], I found some tutors in political lessons are not critical, although they teach us to be critical… I felt the entire Western academia may have prejudice against Chinese political policies. They only focus on picking out the 'undemocratic issues' in China. … I think their opinions are far from critical. (Lan, M, Yr4)

Some students assume the critical thinking habitus developed in TU academic dispositions would entail some 'side effects' when TU students come back into Chinese society. They defined this habitus as 'British', contrasting with the habitus of Chinese society (see section 2.1.4). This is another example showing the academic half and non-academic half cannot be sharply distinguished in the study of students' identity formation at TU.

Ou (M, Yr4) shared an anecdote of a TU graduate, who once worked in a local company in Shanghai. This graduate, with this learned habitus of 'challenging the authorities' formed in TU, quitted her job a few months after she found that company did not agree with her dispositions.

> Her line manager asked her to work overtime just because others did so. She could not understand nor accept it and then argued with that person. Finally, she resigned. Now she is doing her master's degree in Melbourne. (Ou, M, Yr4)

That graduate told Ou that many of her colleagues were not happy with that manager's command to do overtime work, but they pretended to accept it. Ou attributed this phenomenon to the Chinese cultural convention of saving '*mianzi*'. Ou argues Chinese people, his parents' generation in particular, are good at pretending to 'be naïve' rather than 'speaking it out', in order to

save their or/and others' '*mianzi*', which is different from TU students' habitus of 'critical thinking'. Ou assumes that many TU students are bound to encounter re-adaptation challenges back in the Chinese context outside TU. Although he tries to understand this prevailing '*mianzi*' phenomenon in Chinese society, Ou articulates there is a misunderstanding of 'saving *mianzi*'.

> They think keeping silent means protecting others' '*mianzi*'. But I think only by pointing out their mistakes does it mean protecting and loving them. This is also how I love my country. I don't think keeping silent is good. I love this country more than those who never criticise it. I think covering its problems will never facilitate its improvement. (Ou, M, Yr4)

Although these accounts seem to indicate that some participants' 'British academic half' helps to form their critical thinking ability, the particular cases can neither be generalised to all Chinese students at TU, nor assumed to indicate that the acquisition of critical thinking ability is a cultural product generated only in British educational context.

5.2.2 Perception two — 'Am I a half *waiguoren* (外国人, 'foreigner'[30])?

Students holding this perception also tend to perceive their identity as two split halves. In contrast to those holding the first perception, students of this sub-group sense their non-academic life is more exotic/British because they experience much freedom in their after-class life, entitled by TU, but their academic half remains Chinese because they continue to focus on study and scores as they did in their high schools.

One of the typical exotic/British lifestyles at TU to my students is reflected in two particular extracurricular activities, disco dancing and going to the pub. Zhu enjoyed this aspect of 'British' lifestyle very much.

[30] Here 'foreign' means 'non-Chinese', with some superiority in culture and education probably, according to some participants' tone, but not offensive.

> Our life is British. It is hard to say why I feel in this way. Maybe, disco dancing originates from the West. (Zhu, M, Yr1)

The TU 'unique' lifestyle actually is not paralleled with or even contrary to Chinese learning cultures. Students under 18 are often banned by their schools and parents from disco dancing in China. Even Chinese college students do not get used to spending time in discos. A survey in 2017 examining how Chinese college students spent their leisure time in a university in Shandong province found no single student from the total 103 participants who ever danced disco, while 92% reported they would watch TV drama or movies on their cell phone in their leisure time (Bo et al., 2017). My students of this sub-group identify TU lifestyle as being opposite to the traditional Chinese university life, which, they declare, is quite British. This British lifestyle sometimes makes students confused about how to balance their previous dispositions in living and the current situation at TU. For example, Wang felt TU campus life entitled students with 'a privilege' to live in this way- hanging out and getting drunk in a pub.

> Since it is a Sino-foreign university, I ask myself whether I am a half *waiguoren* (foreigner) now?… then can I live a life at this campus like a *waiguoren* (foreigner) to stay up very late and enjoy a night life …because of it's the privilege entitled by TU? (Wang, M, Yr1)

In this sudden change in his lifestyle, Wang defined this 'privilege' as a 'heavy burden'. He was actually shocked at the enormous differences in the non-academic life at TU brought in by such a privilege.

> There is no limitation in our dorm, for example, in using water and electricity. … It is your own life, so you are on your own… [which is] a huge difference from Chinese cultures. In China, even if you are 50 years old, the elders will judge you. But now you are respected as an individual in this university. You decide your life. (Wang, M, Yr1)

He sighed and said,

> But in Chinese universities, students will be told what they should do, and what they should not … [I am afraid] some Chinese students at TU will become dumb forever, … although they may probably feel happy for a while. (Wang, M, Yr 1)

He remained with a dilemma between maintaining a Chinese habitus or the British one newly breaking into his daily life.

> … Sometimes we go out for drinking at 3 am, which I even never dared to imagine before I came here. My mum would beat me if I dared to go out at midnight. … At 3 am, I am playing video games; at 4 am, I am playing video games; at 5 am, I am still playing video games… oh my God! I have definitely been left behind by my former high school classmates in other universities. (Wang, M, Yr1)

Nevertheless, Wang's academic life was not influenced by the TU context. To him, the most important mission at university was to obtain academic achievement. It was no different from that in his high school because what he was concerned about was study and scores; only his non-academic life changed into what he saw as 'British'. Additionally, in order to ease his family's financial burden, he must work hard in hope of winning every year's tuition waiver, as I discussed earlier (see p.141) about his family's relatively poorer economic status compared with that of most TU students. However, being involved in this British-style campus life, he was worried that his 'British' lifestyle may hinder his academic achievements.

Consequently, his Yr1 academic performance seemed to be negatively affected. Two months later, in a follow-up interview, Wang said he was disappointed with the result of one test.

> My result is over 70… when I knew that the highest score is 97, I felt very disappointed with my score. (Wang, M, Yr1)

Nevertheless, he seemed to have overcome the confused status caused by a TU lifestyle and adapted to it, to some extent at least.

> I now get used to going to bed at 1 o'clock and getting up at around 9 o'clock. (Wang, M, Yr1)

Interestingly, he explained his adaptation as a way of 'accepting an arrangement of fate', although he declared he sometimes felt regretful about coming to TU. Wang's 'reason of fate' resonates with the concept of fate in Lin Yutang's discussion on Chinese social construction, as I described in section 2.1.4. This habit of using fate as an excuse or explanation for their decisions and situations they are involved in seems to have been passed down to a younger Chinese generation, such as this 'post-90s'. Wang claims that quick adjustment to an environment is one strength of Chinese people and they should be proud of it.

In contrast to Wang whose panic about his future life at TU is revealed in his accounts in the first-round interview, more joyful surprise at the 'British' lifestyle at TU is found in other participants' accounts. For example, Ning (F, Yr1) and Lu (F, Yr3) acknowledged that they felt comfortable and satisfied living in TU campus.

5.2.3 Perception three – 'We are treated as individual human beings at TU.'

Xing's (M, Yr2) perceptions of what it means to be a TU student differ from those of many of my participants. Rather than splitting TU students' identity into two halves, he sees it as a single entity because TU provides conditions that let students remain such a unified entity. He concludes that TU students are treated as 'an individual human being' - in particular in his school (IS) - compared with his previous role as a student in his high school. Xing recalled that he was always commanded by his high school teachers to recite only what was printed in the textbooks and was discouraged from questioning the contents. As a consequence, he felt depressed in high school. By contrast, learning at TU liberates him.

> Having entering TU, I feel my real nature is released. I am finally free! (Xing, M, Yr2)

Xing argues that it is the adequate freedom TUers are entitled to in both their academic and daily lives that helps guarantee their due as individuals: 'This university builds an open, free and compatible environment for us'.

The most satisfying aspect of these freedoms to Xing is academic freedom because he can question his teachers and the textbooks without being warned or criticised at TU. To him, this constitutes his right as an individual. The major he studied (IS[31]) could provide the maximum of such an academic freedom, in Xing's opinion.

> I and some brother and sister learners in IS think students in our school have real academic freedom in this university. … Our students and tutors can express our comments freely without worrying about putting ourselves in trouble. (M, Yr2)

Meanwhile, Xing is concerned that TU's entitlement of TUers as free individuals may have problematic side effects on some students: without teachers' commands, as they were used to receiving in previous schooling experiences, some students may not easily adapt to this new TU environment as TU expects. For example, in students' academic life, Xing observed:

> The 'liberation' in TU also brings something bad to students. Some TUers are motivated to become aggressive, arrogant and overconfident. … They think they are working hard but actually they only spend a day in the library, take a selfie, and drink a cup of milk tea. Look at their Wechat Moments… (Xing, M, Yr2)

[31] Other participants from IS confirmed that this major was indeed distinguished from other similar majors in traditional Chinese universities (e.g. Kong, F, alumna; Lv, F, Yr2; Xu, M, Yr1; Zhou, F, Yr4).

Xing arrives at this conclusion based on his comparison of his observations at TU and in a Summer School held in Peking University. What particularly provoked my thinking is what Xing said afterward: 'It is definitely unfair to compare TUers with students in Peking University.' (Xing, M, Yr2)

Peking University which ranks as the top university in China symbolises a peak of social capital in Chinese society. Being admitted into Peking University is seen as an honour by all Chinese, including students. It implies that you have been a good student throughout your entire school life - or at least in high school - and have scored very high marks in *Gaokao*. My participants showed a tendency to categorise students by their *Gaokao* scores. As I discussed in section 4.1, most TUers' self-perception is that they are *Gaokao* failures. When Xing made the above comment, he did not say it in an ironic tone, but he expressed his sincere respect for Peking University students.

5.2.4 Perception four – 'We are all "foreigners".'

Kong maintains that Chinese students at TU are not more 'foreign' than those in traditional Chinese universities, in either academic or non-academic aspects. Rather, she argues, in general, all Chinese college students tend to become 'foreign' to some extent.

> We are all 'foreigners' … As one article says that modern HE around the world is based on the Enlightenment in Europe, we [Chinese college students] are bound to become Westernised. (Kong, F, alumna)

Kong's remark came after she recalled her experiences of working with members of a Student Society in a 'traditional' university in China when she was studying in TU. She felt TUers were unwelcome and even rejected by their peers in that university. Kong thinks that their rejection resulted from their peers' fear of communicating with 'foreigners' and TUers were treated as 'foreigners' by them. It was in reflecting on this experience that Kong made the above statement.

In academic literature, the Enlightenment in the 18th century in Europe is often seen as the foundation of the establishment of modern higher education institutions, including Chinese universities (*大学 daxue*) (Abu-Rabia-Queder 2008; Asgharzadeh & Nazim, 2018; Buzan & Lawson, 2013). The Chinese term '*大学 daxue'* used to merely refer to one of the 'Four Books' in Confucianism[32], but it is mainly used in the contemporary context to represent a 'higher educational institution' (Chen, 2016; Wu, 2016; Xiang, 2002). Wu (2016) argues that the 'pedagogic discourse' of Chinese universities is grounded by this European 'conception of rationality' (p.93), so it can be argued that Chinese college students may learn and live in such 'Westernised' university contexts. Some Chinese scholars, however, maintain that Chinese universities have developed distinctive characteristics (Ke, 2016; Wu, 2016; Zhao, 2016); for example, some courses are set up in 'traditional' Chinese universities, such as military training and education, and ideological and political education (MoE, 2019). Such courses are compulsory as significant parts of *Suzhi* Education in Chinese HE (MoE, 2018). Bu et al. (2016) believes that HE in China continues its central goal of person-making, following the Confucian model, to help young people to achieve 'self-awareness' (p.204) in contemporary Chinese society. Even if those specific courses 'with Chinese characteristics' may aim to retain Chinese distinctness amongst Chinese college students, there are no such courses named- military training (军寻/*junxun*) and ideological education (思政课/*sizheng ke*) - at TU.

There is a course at TU, however, named Chinese Culture Course(中华文化课), playing a similar role to those courses in 'traditional' Chinese universities. This course, taught in Chinese, is open to all students at TU, including international students, but the attendance of all Chinese Yr1 and Yr2

[32] Daxue (*大学* The Great Learning) was one of the 'Four Books' in Confucianism (Daxue, Wikipedia).

students is compulsory. Teaching of this course includes multiple facets of Chinese culture, such as 'the literal glamour of Chinese characters' (Wei, M, Yr4), 'Confucianism' (Zhou, F, Yr4) and 'Chinese history' (Jiang, F, Yr4) (also see TU website). Many of my participants refused to take this course seriously. Tan (F, Yr1) noted that her brother/sister learners suggested that this course was not important. She noticed many students did their assignments from other courses during the session of this course. Shan (F, Yr1) speculated that the reason why many students ignored this course may be because 'we pay a large amount of tuition fees for fully-English courses at TU, not for Chinese courses'. Ma (M, Yr3) remarked that this course may aim to reinforce students' patriotic consciousness, but he argued 'that students dislike of learning this course should not be interpreted as dislike of our country'.

Some participants did report their interest in this course. Zhu (M, Yr1) considered this course as interesting. Tan (F, Yr1) maintained learning about some Chinese culture would benefit students' future employment and employability because having a good knowledge of both English and Chinese cultures was an advantage of TUers over other Chinese students in traditional universities in China.

My participants attitudes towards the ideological and military training courses in traditional universities vary. Some dislike military training (e.g. Chu, M, Yr3; Feng, F, Yr4; Guan, M, Yr3; Shan, F, Yr1). For example, Guan (M, Yr3) said, 'I cannot understand why college students are forced to attend military training. We can spend the time doing something else.' It is important to note, however, that some of my participants regard military training as a meaningful group activity which college students could attend as a class. Additionally, attending military training will create a good opportunity for them to get along with their new classmates and make more friends, although the training will be very tiring. For example, Yuan (F, Yr3) thought not attending military training was 'the only pity' in her life trajectory in this university. Nan said she even envied her former high school

classmates studying in state-run universities in China when she first came to TU because,

> They belong to a class in the charge of a class tutor. It is a sense of belonging. But in this university, everyone is told to be an individual. I felt no one took care of us. I felt very lonely when I was in Yr1. (Nan, F, Yr2)

Because of a lack of this type of larger-scale and longer-lasting group activities at TU, some participants, Yr1 in particular, reported they found, amongst TUers, that it was difficult to establish close *tongxue* relationships, an experience that is common amongst students in traditional Chinese universities.

> My former high school classmates said they attended most activities in their universities together as a class. Therefore, they can develop close friendships with their classmates. … But it will never happen in our university. Although I have 20 classmates, we seldom meet and stay together because our academic schedules are different. It is hard to make new friends and establish close connections with them. … Maybe this reflects the individualism in the Western university. (He, F, Yr1)

Then, will TU students become less Chinese, or as Kong suggested, are all college students being Westernised?

Addressing Kong's claim that universities westernise all students, it seems the situation is not so straightforward. In TU we find students who are less welcoming of the attempts at reinforcing Chinese identity through various courses, but they often welcome these celebrations of Chinese culture; some also regret having less access to aspects of Chinese culture that they welcome and value, and wish to hold on to, notably a sense of community.

Characteristics as TUers

Although in Kong's eyes, TUers are not more 'foreign' than their counterparts in traditional Chinese universities, she still lists some nuances in the distinctions between TU and a traditional Chinese university. For example, she argues that TUers are gradually losing some habits that are common amongst the Chinese public.

> Many TUers have less passion in practicing giving gifts and dining with people for some purposes as others do in Chinese society, the so-called '*guanxi*'. Rather, we prefer to go Dutch when hanging out with peers. ... We often have little interest in taking the competitive Civil Service Examination as those in traditional universities do. (Kong, F, alumna)

- No interest in developing *guanxi*

In Kong's observation, TUers are not as interested in developing '*guanxi*', compared with their Chinese peers in traditional universities in China. She found that some college students in traditional universities are keen on boasting of their wide '*guanxi*'. Referring to her classmates doing a master's degree in the same British university as she attended but having graduated from 'traditional' Chinese universities, Kong declared:

> They like to say 'I know a professor in Cambridge… My sister/brother learners are in Nankai[33] … I often have a dinner with someone' [professors or students from a famous university]. (Kong, F, alumna)

'*Guanxi*' is regarded as a 'variant' form of social capital, constructed and practiced in Chinese society (Chen et al., 2013; Qi, 2013). This term is familiar to the Chinese public and also a heated topic in academia (*ibid*). My participants regard '*tongxue*' relationships at TU not as being equal to '*guanxi*'; in their opinion, '*guanxi*' stands for 'the secular social connections' (Ma, M, Yr3) or 'the immoral relationships' (Ou, M, Yr4). Rather, they acknowledge the connections established amongst their peers at TU as a

[33] Nankai University, a first ranking higher education institution in China.

healthy social connection and social capital, which are significant for their future. In their eyes, these social connections are established in an honest spirit of friendship rather than the immoral connections such as corruption which are widely seen as constituting *guanxi*. For example, Wei, majoring in business, is aware of the importance of 'the schoolmate network of TU' to his future career (M, Yr4). Ou (M, Yr4) illustrates that these schoolmates he met at TU would become his business cooperators and good reciprocal partners in the future.

> For example, my company needs 10 million RMB investment in the future. I will easily get it because I know these schoolmates, and they all have rich families and will invest in me. (Ou, M, Yr4)

- Diversity in career aspirations

Twenty three participants talked about their future career aspirations with me. As Kong suggested, they aspired to diverse directions in their future career. Twelve of them expressed their desires for overseas working experiences or employment opportunities in various international companies. Some even considered travelling and working around the world. For example, Chu (M, Yr3) and Chen (M, Yr1) reported similar ideal career aspirations – to work in as many countries and places as possible in their lives.

The remaining 11 would like to look for a job in China after graduation. Some preferred to undertake teaching and training jobs (e.g. Bai, M, Yr4; Ou, M, Yr4), start their own business (e.g. Peng, F, Yr3; Zhang, F, Yr1), attempt NGO work (e.g. Lan, M, Yr4; Zhou, F, Yr4), or work as technicians (e.g. Tan, F, Yr1). However, none of these participants reported they would take the 'civil servant exam', although working as a civil servant is one of the most popular career choices amongst graduates from 'traditional' universities in China (Lu, 2019; Wang, 2015). Song (F, Yr3) and Shan (F, Yr1) even express their unwillingness to work as 'a civil servant'. According to Song, the job *per se* was not the reason why she was not interested in it but the 'sophisticated relationships between superior and subordinate' deterred her.

Shan's negative impression of working as a civil servant came from her parents' working experiences, which was discussed in section 4.1.2 (see p.134).

5.3 Identity formation through self-categorisation and self-exploration

This sub-section presents how the identity of TUers' is formed as seen by my participants in TU and how they see their 'self' in the reflection of the others. My participants gradually come to regard their identity formation as a process of social reproduction of the TU cultures. Specifically, they maintain that in this process, TU students consciously or subconsciously follow and later pass on the TU culture and grow up with such culture inherited from previous generations of students. In the meantime, my participants have engaged in self-reflection on who they think they are, and self-identification through positions of 'me/we-others' to distinguish the 'mainstream' TUers and the non-mainstream TUers when perceiving their self.

5.3.1 How TUers form their identity: participants' accounts

As I discussed in section 4.2.1, my participants observe and identify a mainstream TU culture. Twenty out of 45 participants declared this culture or lifestyle is circulated amongst TU students, and newcomers often consciously imitate the previous generation of students' approaches to learning and living in TU because they believe it is a good way to quickly adapt to TU context. For example, Lu noticed the existence of a strong awareness amongst students of 'what style of life we should live at TU'. She put it this way,

> We all know that what we should focus on in different stages of study at TU, like joining in Student Societies in Yr1, grabbing grades in Yr2, preparing for IELTS or TOEFL for overseas further study in Yr3… It seems that we all follow this path. (Lu, F, Yr3)

The remaining 25 participants, although they did not mention explicitly such continuity of culture and lifestyle in TU, implied there are some key words in TU culture, such as 'freedom', 'volunteer programme' and 'Student Societies participation', as I earlier presented in section 4.2.1 (see p.151, 'TU mainstream culture'). Guided by my students' accounts, the process of how TUers form their identity is modelled in Figure 5.3.1.

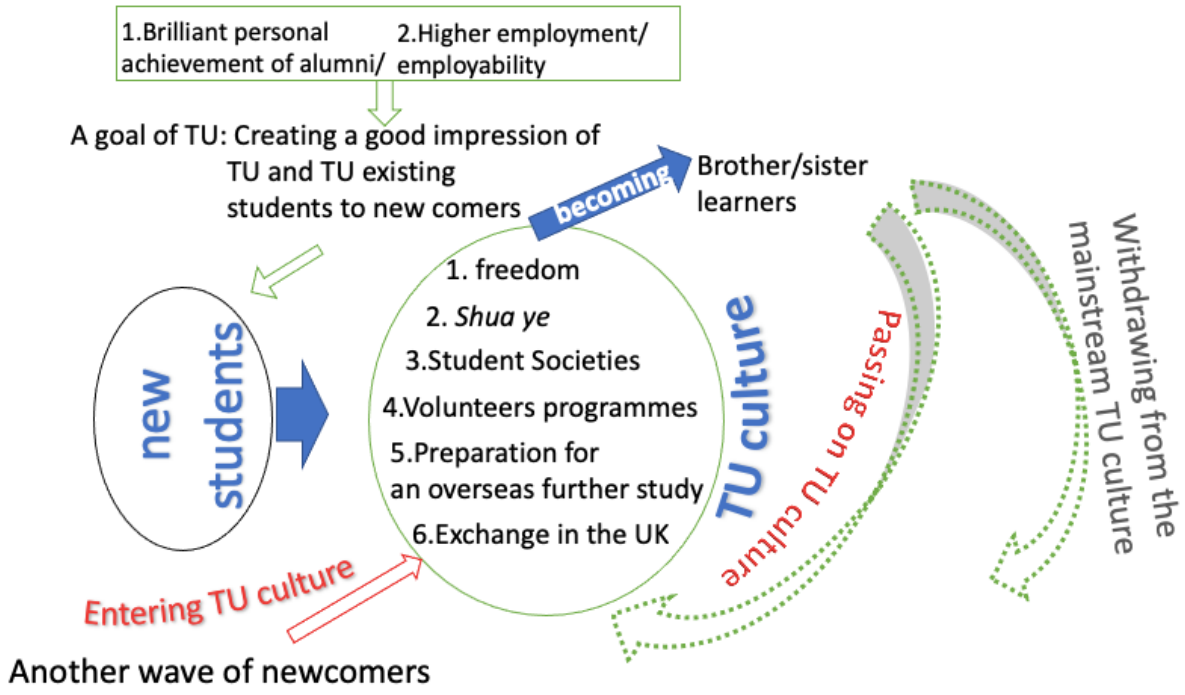

Figure 5.3.1 The process of TUers' identification at TU

This diagram presents TUers' identity formation in my students' accounts. According to my participants, this university intends to make a good impression on its new students, particularly that teaching and learning experiences in TU are impressive and TU students emerge with excellent employability options. My students realise this is the goal of TU, and also their purpose for coming to TU. Some of my participants mentioned they had gained this impression even before entering TU through their parents' friends or by attending TU's sharing sessions in their high schools (e.g. Feng, F, Yr4; Shan, F, Yr1; Zhou, F, Yr4). New TU students with such an impression of TU and TU students meet TU culture already primed with 'key'

words and phrases, such as 'freedom', '*shua ye*', 'student societies', 'volunteer programmes', 'preparation for an overseas further study' and 'exchange in the UK' (see section 4.2.1). A year later, these new students will become the brother/sister learners of another new cohort of students and will play a key part in passing on the TU culture to them (see Lan's quotes on p. 144). On their transition from being new students to the brother/sister learners of another new wave of students, my participants' views separate into two camps. Some identified the similarities with their own experiences in such transitions of other students and chose to belong to the mainstream TUers, while some consciously distinguished themselves from the 'typical' TUers and decided to socially withdraw from the mainstream but formed a group of non-mainstream students at TU (see section 4.2.1).

5.3.2 Developing a TU lifestyle

Just accepting a TU lifestyle

According to Xing's (M, Yr2) and Bai's (M, Yr4) observations, many TUers easily and happily accept a TU style by being engaged in it. Xing (M, Yr2) maintained that TU encourages students to develop a 'TU-style of life' through organising various activities, such as Iweek and sharing sessions by brother/sister learners to deliver a message that the TU lifestyle is democratic and full of freedom, and TU students are excellent and confident. He maintains that many TUers believe that freedom provided by this university is the prerequisite for a TU lifestyle. To them, this TU style means lively and diverse university lives. Xing gave an example to justify what this style was like, that at TU students can choose from various types of academic and non-academic programmes at TU, different from their counterparts in traditional universities in China who must take part in the compulsory programmes arranged by their universities. Although such freedom in my participants' accounts mainly means more options, to them it is having these options that is sufficient to make them feel free in their

university life. According to Xing, TU students are willingly to accept this style for such a sense of freedom.

Bai defined TU style as 'to be excellent and confident'. He sensed it was the TU atmosphere that reinforced TU students' will to pursue this way of university life at TU. In his opinion, this style would be good for TU students' personal development; they have no reason not to follow it.

> I think TUers are and must be confident. This confidence comes from our university. I remembered our president delivered a speech in one ceremony and said something like 'TUers should be proud of and have self-confidence in our university and our excellent students.' (Bai, M, Yr4)

Bai employed the TU president's statement to underpin his claim that TUers are confident. He could not tell whether the confidence came from students' experiences of life at TU or was based on the same psychological influence that he reported on hearing the president's speech. He just sensed an atmosphere of self-confidence at TU. Bai also cited evidence from the TU website that 'our in-demand graduates [are] getting offers from the Fortune 500 companies and outstanding alumni [are] admitted into top UK/US universities'. He added – in a comment that illustrates the 'invisible' action of structures - that in order to become such a confident and excellent TUer, 'somehow a series of programmes and activities as preparations to become excellent have been generated in this campus'. This series of programmes are often introduced during sharing sessions at TU and passed on by TU students as their 'to-do-list'. This might be how and why Lv (F, Yr2) planned her university life in her Yr1 as I early discussed.

> Specifically, Yr1 students should focus on Student Societies; Yr2 on overseas exchange programmes; Yr3 on IELTS; Yr4 on application for a master's degree (Bai, M, Yr4).

Bai defined participation in these programmes and activities as TUers' lifestyle and such participation made a student 'a genuine TUer' – again a statement that captures the process of habitus formation. Although he emphasised it benefited TU students individually, he also pointed out that accepting the TU culture and style would perpetuate community homogeneity.

> Many TUers believe our lives at TU are open to diversities, but we are actually led by this central goal of TU – to be an excellent TUer - and live in this mainstream culture. Perhaps most students are too lazy to think of any change. In our daily life, we also think we are open. We are good at entertaining ourselves. But apart from *shua ye*, dancing disco and drinking, I never see other ways of entertainment in this university. (Bai, M, Yr4)

Pushed to accept TU style

Not all TU students, however, as Bai argued, were too lazy to think of changing rather than just accepting the 'TU style'. Some of my participants declared they were pulled into the mainstream TU culture by intangible forces and live in this TU style, no matter whether they like it or not. Kong (F, alumna) witnessed when she was studying in TU that anyone who rejected the mainstream TU culture and style would be heavily criticised by the representations of the forces for continuity - many TU students, the brother/sister learners who organise Iweek, student societies and sharing sessions in particular, in her eyes.

Yue (M, Yr1) maintains that these forces start to influence students when they first came into TU. He claimed that it was two sister learners who first made him aware of the existence of the TU culture and what it was like. The two sister learners were Iweek leaders and they suggested that Yr1 TUers should pay full attention to Student Societies work 'because that is what Yr1 students should do'. Yue even defined what the sister learners called the 'political correctness of TU'. He assumed anyone who dared not to follow the path of the existing TUers would trap themselves into trouble. He admitted

he should make a compromise between being himself and following others, in order to avoid any trouble.

Tan (F, Yr1) followed her brother/sister learners' suggestions to do her work in the student society that she took part in during some less important lessons, such as the cultural course, in order not to be criticised by her leader. She admitted that, although she liked the cultural course, she often gave priority to her work during the course classes. As to the cultural course, her student society leader had shared the trick with her that as long as she punched her student card at the end of each lesson, the tutors would let students pass.

Wang knew this trick and followed it too, although he was also interested in the cultural course. He did so for fear of being marginalised by his peers. He stated,

> The culture course is worth learning but I dare not do so because I am afraid that my classmates will mock at me and judge me as an ass-kisser to the teacher. (Wang, M, Yr1)

- <u>A superior-subordinate tie</u>

These accounts imply that there exists a superior-subordinate tie between new students and their brother/sister learners at TU, which has been approved of and passed on amongst Chinese students at TU. It is on the condition of such a superior-subordinate relationship that 'TU culture' can be passed down so directly as a set of normative statements and expectations. One end of such a tie remains the brother/sister learners while the other is mainly Yr1 students, the 'children' (*xiao peng you,* or 'little friends') identified by the brother/sister learners. The 'brother/sister learners relationship with Yr1 students' seems to be an extension of the implications of Chinese ethical relationship principles, in which brothers and sisters are respected and empowered and the younger/'children' are usually expected to be the followers and compliers in the family.

Such a hierarchical relationship was easily identified in TU's student societies according to my students' accounts. Kong described a basic principle agreed on amongst TU students that one's position in student societies was determined by the one's stage of study.

> Usually, senior students will lead those Yr1 'children'. This is a tradition in TU's student societies. At TU, the higher your stage of study is, the higher your position will be. Yr2 students usually become 'ministers' in the formal hierarchy of the society, but even an 'ordinary' Yr2 member in any student society will be respected and followed by the Yr1 children. This is natural. (Kong, F, alumna)

Some older students even got used to addressing Yr1 students as 'children'. For example,

> Our society has recruited 6 children this semester. (Ma, M, Yr3)

> In Yr1, I just played my role as a '*xiao peng you*'. In Yr2, I was naturally promoted as 'minister' in my society. (Zhou, F, Yr4)

In contrast, however, some older students disliked this practice of labelling Yr1 students as 'children' as a way to emphasise a brother/sister learner's superior status in the social order at TU. Zheng (M, Yr3) and Chu (M, Yr3), as leaders of their respective student societies, never called Yr1 students, 'children', and consciously rejected building such a hierarchical relationship in their team. Zheng said:

> Maybe others do not feel this, but I think addressing Yr1 students as 'children' reveals the brother/sister learners' self-fulfilling [desire for] superiority. I never do so to my team. (Zheng, M, Yr3)

Chu (M, Yr3) conveyed his discomfort when hearing Yr1 students being addressed as 'children' and judged by some so-called brother/sister learners.

He questioned: 'Can we judge Yr1 students just because we came a year earlier before them and are one year older?'

- Unsmooth acculturation to TU culture and lifestyle

Under such an openly normative hierarchical regime, some participants' adaptation to the TU culture was not smooth, but sometimes accompanied by unhappiness and confusion. For example, Nan was unhappy in the folk music group in her Yr1, but she knew she should tolerate this unhappiness and keep silent and obedient because she held a view that,

> Yr1 students have no discourse power. (Nan, F, Yr2)

When she became a Yr2 student, she felt it was safe to express her opinion in the group because,

> I am one year older than most current members now and have had one-year experience in our team. Our leader is only a Yr2 student just as I am. (Nan, F, Yr2)

In seeking membership of a student society, Wang experienced his very first interview in his life and he used 'disaster' to depict it:

> Firstly, they told me to introduce myself. That was the first interview I had ever taken in my life. I had no idea what exactly I should do. After I introduced myself, a sister learner was angry and said in a loud voice: 'I asked you to do a 3-minute self-introduction. But what did you do!' After she said that, I felt down in the dumps. The whole interview was a disaster. (Wang, M, Yr1)

Zheng was shouted by a brother learner in his interview in Yr1 too, because Zheng asked a question back rather than directly did what he was asked to do.

> I found the topics they talked about were all about a sports beverage. I was curious whether they were sponsored by that sports beverage company and

> told them my curiosity. But one brother learner suddenly shouted to me 'No, they are not our sponsor!', in a strict and loud voice. I thought silently, 'why brother learners cannot speak to Yr1 students in a peaceful voice? They want to scare Yr1 students?' (Zheng, M, Yr3)

When trying to adapt to the TU culture and form a TU style, some participants found themselves trapped in confusion and mal-adjustment when they first came to TU. For example, Yi declared he lost a sense of balance in his life in Yr1, by being pulled into the mainstream TU culture.

> My Yr1 was aimless. I took part in so many activities as others did. I feel these activities were all meaningless now. (Yi, M, Yr2)

Xing described his Yr1 life at TU as 'muddled'. Apart from the endless participation in student societies and activities, he found he did not do anything else. He sighed and said,

> Mostly students want others to believe they enjoy taking part in various student activities. Look at their WeChat Moments. They are happy to show off their busy life by posting how many activities they have taken part in. I cannot believe that I was one of them. (Xing, M, Yr2)

He confessed that he had applied for temporary suspension from the university and at the time of the interview was staying at home. This was what he really needed now – to have a break from the busy and 'fake' (as he judged it) life at TU. He was enjoying his slow life at home.

> Now I am living my own life. I am only doing some reading, watching films and writing novels. I will not hurry to return to TU until I have made a good mental and physical preparation for my return. (Xing, M, Yr2)

Similarly, Yr1 participant Shan's accounts revealed her confusion about whether living a TU style was 'correct'. She stated,

> It is good that I am independent, and I can make my own choice from all these options provided by our university. But I cannot stop feeling guilty because my parents pay this large amount of tuition fees for me to 'study' not 'play'. (Shan, F, Yr1)

It is easy to understand Shan's confusion because in Chinese culture, 'study' (*xue xi*) plays a vital role to students as a social norm, as I discussed earlier (Liu & Xu, 2020). All my participants regard *xue xi* not as an option but as an obligation they must accept as students. In this respect, although Shan confessed that she disliked *xue xi*, 'a sense of complete guilt' appeared as long as she found herself not spending enough time on her study. This powerful cultural expectation students bring with them to TU may hinder their acculturation to the TU context.

Yue's case might be exceptional amongst my participants; his mal-adjustment to TU culture was very strong. Initially, Yue's response to TU culture was to become an excellent TUer as those brother/sister learners he read about on the TU website; however, he was frustrated in his initiative. With his permission, I can report his story. In a casual conversation on WeChat, at the end of his first semester of Yr1, he said he was bothered by the result of the university scholarships for diligent and excellent undergraduates. On the WeChat Moments of the excellent TUers he followed, many had posted news of their rewards. On the one hand, Yue looked up to them; on the other hand, he thought he had no confidence that he could do as well as they did. He then bitterly regretted coming to TU rather than a traditional university in China. Yue thought he could have lived an easy life – no need to push himself to follow the role models of those excellent TUers and set great goals for himself - if he had been studying in a university in his hometown. He even added:

> I am tired of living here. Now I have to persuade myself not to jump out of the top of this building… Death is the ultimate spiritual liberation. (Yue, M, Yr1)

Yue's words were worrying. I suggested he should see a professional counselor. We had kept contact since the first interview meeting. Yue became a Yr3 student at the time I started to write this report and was busy with preparing for his IELTS examinations and further study overseas just as his brother/sister learners were doing. In this sense he seems to have succeeded in completing his transition to becoming TU student and following a TU style.

From the follow-up casual WeChat talks and information that they posted on their WeChat Moment, I know that all participants, including Yue, mentioned in this sub-section have adapted to their lives at TU. Perhaps, as Wang (M, Yr1) claimed for himself, they accepted TU culture and life by just embracing the arrangement of fate at TU (see section 5.2.2) but without committing to it wholeheartedly. Many of them as Xing and Bai described, however, live a life, an apparently genuine TU style life – taking part in student societies as regularly as their peers, posting selfies and busily preparing for their next steps. However, whether what they accepted is a 'genuine' TU style or not is not important. The important thing is that they have found their own way of living at TU that they are comfortable with. They have all become brother/sister learners to other new students and some are good at sharing their experiences of growing at TU. For example, Xing has successfully re-engaged in TU culture and enjoys TU life. His name appears several times on the list of student-organisers of public lectures on TU's WeChat platform; he has become a high-profile figure at TU and one of the excellent TUers in other students' eyes.

Yue continues to look for a compromise, according to our casual talks during these years. Nevertheless, he has come to his Yr4 and become a brother learner to others and started to guide new TUers.

5.3.3. TUers: me, us and others

Several participants noticed the existence of the mainstream TU culture and TUers and the non-mainstream students in TU (see section 4.2.1). In particular 7 participants in my research, Hua (M, Yr2), Jia (F, Yr4), Lv (F, Yr2), Nan (F, Yr2), Wei (M, Yr4), Yi (M, Yr2), and Yue (M, Yr1), tended to categorise themselves and some *tongxue* (classmates) and brother/sister learners in TU they knew as the non-mainstream. In their eyes, most students in TU belonged to the mainstream – to them, the mainstream are a larger group of students in TU who are perfectly following what the 'mainstream TU culture' instructs them to do and are willing to live a TU lifestyle whether they easily accepted it or were pushed to accept it as I previously discussed. This mainstream culture is simply the culture of the majority that has been reinforced over time as it is more-or-less 'handed down' (through processes outlined in this research) from one generation of 'mainstream students' to another. Additionally, these participants noticed that the mainstream, Yr1 students in particular, seem just to 'play hard' but forget to 'work hard' as students. The remaining 38 participants, according to the other sub-group's differentiation and categorisation were put into 'the mainstream' category. It is worth pointing out that the above classification is merely for the convenience of presenting my participants' identity formation, based only on my participants' interview accounts.

The mainstream: me and us

Accounts of 'the mainstream' category reveal they consciously or subconsciously accepted and engaged in the TU mainstream culture. Their responses to becoming a TUer were positive. Specifically, some were happy to become TUers because they generally had a sense of belonging to and being involved in TU and willingly accepted their identity as 'TUers'. They would like to use 'we/us/our' to refer to TUers and their involvement in TU. Some maintain TU provides them with satisfying educational and living experiences. These students expressed their pride in studying in this

university and their desire to become an excellent TUer as modelled by those excellent brother/sister learners presented by TU.

- A sense of satisfaction with their experiences at TU

Having a sense of satisfaction with their experiences at TU made the mainstream easily and happily accept their role as TUers. For example, Xing (M, Yr2) defined himself as a student frequently criticised by his high school teachers because he often questioned their teachings. But at TU, he could freely discuss questions with his tutors without being regarded as a trouble-maker. He liked this university because 'students are treated as individuals in this place' although he admitted his first adaptation to his university life was not smooth (see section 5.3.2). He found his own solution and came back to TU a year later, after our first interview and played his role as an excellent brother learner as I early discussed.

Cai's (M, Yr2) satisfaction resulted from the friendly tutors at TU. He was impressed with one of his tutors in Yr1 in particular. That tutor kept sending greetings to him and other students, which made Cai sense expressions of concern from that tutor. Moreover, this tutor helped Cai tackle troubles he encountered in the student society he took part in. More importantly, Cai felt he and his efforts at TU were valued by that tutor. He was even invited to share his experiences in learning and living at TU with that tutor's later students. Cai said: 'We are really like friends to each other.'

Ren also sensed friendliness from her tutor. Because of being remembered by her tutor, she formed a sense of existence as a TUer in this university.

> To my great surprise, I was remembered by one of my Yr1 tutors. One day he called me by my name and greeted to me. I know I was not an active student in his class, but the tutor still remembered me. … However, in retrospect, in high school, I was ignored by our head teacher [the teacher who is in charge of a class] because only those 'good' students with higher marks were worth paying attention to. I was not such a kind of 'good' student.

> I was 'invisible' to my head teacher. But tutors here know of my existence. (Ren, F, Yr2)

Although Wang (M, Yr1) spent longer time on his transition to TU, he reported he accepted others as TUers and joined himself in his *tongxue*, by the time of our second interview. In our first interview, he talked much about his worries and even regretted to come to TU because he asserted 'only Chinese universities will fit well for Chinese students.' Two months later, in the follow-up interview, he told me he had succeeded in stepping into a second period of his time at TU – 'a self-exploration period' in his words. In this period, the freedom at TU did not frighten him anymore. He learned to make good use of that freedom to explore what he could do in this university.

> I just tell myself not to pay attention to these differences from my high school life…. You know those excellent TU students are self-reliant and self-organised rather than dependent on tutors' pushing. (Wang, M, Yr1)

Wang, the one who regarded adaptating to TU culture and style as accepting his fate, said after he decided to accept TU, he learned not to concentrate on these external conditions in non-academic life at TU but on improving his own academic performance, such as his presentation skills.

In our first interview, Wang was worried that students at TU may waste their time on just playing rather than learning or even became loafers because of so much freedom they were given. In the follow-up interview, however, he changed his negative view on TU students by observing his classmates' good qualities as students such as being self-organised and hard working.

> I find our group members are working very hard. … We don't mind staying up late at night in order to submit a perfect report. We are well cooperative, and no one complains. (Wang, M, Yr1)

Wang even felt pressure, although he is one of a few undergraduate students in TU who have won a tuition waiver for his good *Gaokao* result.

> I find there are 'hidden' excellent students amongst my classmates. They are very good at some subjects that we are learning, such as drawing and designing. (Wang, M, Yr1)

Lan, a Yr4 participant, asserted that from his observation, students at TU decided to accept the role of TUers of their own free will rather than negatively being formed by the TU culture or TU style.

> This university conveys a view that there is no absolute and permanent accuracy. At TU, it is not wrong if your goal is not to become a grade grubber. But many traditional universities set this goal to their students. This university does not make you to become whom [it thinks is right]. Students choose to become who they are. (Lan, M, Yr4)

Different from the abovementioned cases, rather than emphasising or denying his role as a TUer, Bai defined himself as a satisfied consumer of TU education.

> I enjoy consuming the British educational experiences provided by TU. It is worth its high tuition fees. (Bai, M, Yr4)

Bai maintained TU had kept its promise to provide a 'real' British education and even helped to polish its graduates' resume with this British diploma. He emphasised that, although many outsiders may underestimate students at TU because of their relatively lower *Gaokao* result by comparing them with those studying in 985/211 universities, and TUers may not see themselves as 'good' students, they were developing as individuals and even developed better than their counterparts in those in first tier Chinese universities.

> Some of my former classmates in high school are studying in 211 university universities in China. But they are just like high school students, sitting in the classrooms to listen to the teacher's lecture. They just learn for passing exams in university just as high school students who need to learn for *Gaokao*. I assume the situation in other [Chinese traditional] universities is similar. Students seldom change there. I pity them. (Bai, M, Yr4)

The non-mainstream: others vs. me

The seven participants of the non-mainstream sub-group reported they strengthened their own conception of who they would like to become and what they would like to do at TU, after observing others' life in TU. They seemed to have experienced a mismatch between the TU culture in their imagination and expectation before coming here and the reality after they entered this university. Wei claimed, 'I did some research about this university before coming here. Jia (F, Yr4) said: 'My dad heard this university is good and made the decision for me.' During the transitional period in Yr1, however, they found TU was not as they expected or as it was described by others such as their parents. Jia disliked the TU lifestyle because she found these senior students were 'over proud of being students of this university and looked down up Yr1 students'. She admitted that in order to avoid those 'proud' brother/sister learners she refused to take part in any student societies at TU.

> I am not living a typical TU life as others do, but I have gone through my university trajectory happily in my own way. I feel good. Others may feel I am odd, though. (Jia, F, Yr4)

Unlike Jia, Wei (M, Yr4), Hua (M, Yr2) and Yi (M, Yr2) did not choose to socially withdraw themselves from others. Instead, they attempted to explore a suitable personal lifestyle by observing and imitating the brother/sister learners at first. Finally, they found imitating others was not a shortcut for determining what life they should live at TU. For example, Hua, as an 'empiricist', found what he was really interested in was study, after

spending a whole year experiencing and exploring life at TU, such as taking part in *shua ye* and various student societies. He then decided to fully focus on his study. Since Yr2 he had declined 'the TU style of social connection'.

Yi also completed self-exploration through experiencing and observing others' life at TU. He maintained that independence from others' influences was important. When he first came to TU, he also attempted to adapt to the TU culture as others and become an excellent TUer as those brother/sister learners had done. He then discovered that,

> TUers have huge ambitions to do extraordinary things and become extraordinary people. They all plan to do further study in Cambridge or Oxford university. As if they failed to go to Cambridge or Oxford or other top universities, they would shame the title of a TUer. (Yi, M, Yr2)

He tried to do so in his Yr1 but only left himself with much pain. He then realised he should focus on his study because 'dedication to one's study is what a university student should do'. Moreover, he thought he should become self-reliant, although it seemed not his real willingness. In retrospect, he said,

> Everyone was occupied with their own stuff. No one I could turn to, although I really hoped someone could give me his hand, when I was in Yr1. (Yi, M, Yr2)

In this respect, the final goal he set for himself was to accomplish 'independence of personality'. To him this meant 'even if all people are gone from the world, you will still remain calm.' In other words, he explained that 'one's personality is moulded through one's internal world rather than external communication'. Yi realised he can gradually control his own life and would soon gain the happiness he wished.

> My desires have got smaller, while my abilities have become stronger. … I feel I have a sense of joy in my heart. I have become dedicated. I can control over my own life. [For example], I can jump between 'play' and 'study' flexibly, rather than follow others as I did in Yr1. (Yi, M, Yr2)

In contrast to learning from experiencing, Lv (F, Yr2) and Nan (F, Yr2) explored who they really wanted to be mainly through 'thinking'. Lv (F, Yr2) admitted that when she was in high school, she started to consider her 'life creed'. From the first day of coming to TU, she continuously reminded herself that her purpose of going to university was to fulfill her 'life creed' - to become a scholar. And she was aware of what she would encounter on the way to accomplishing her goal. She depicted herself as 'isolated' and 'lonely' and was ready to accept this status.

> TUers are exposed to an entertainment atmosphere rather than an academic atmosphere in this university. … Those engaged in learning in this university are bound to be in a minority and belong to the marginalised. (Lv, M, Yr2)

Nevertheless, Lv was not an unsociable student. She put in this way,

> I am good at communicating with people. I have a lot of WeChat friends. My good friends who I can talk about 'study' with are few, though. (Lv, F, Yr2)

Nan (F, Yr2) said her first half semester of Yr1 was spent following her brother/sister learners' suggestions to focus on participating in student societies and preparing for her overseas further study because she thought students coming to TU were inspired or even led to do so. She decided to make a change in her life at TU, however; this occurred during the winter vacation and for the first two weeks in her second half of Yr1 after considering what life she really aspired to live.

> I figured out that things I did in the first semester were not what I really wanted to do, but just imitated what others were doing. I needed to make a change. Then, I decided to start from spending my leisure time learning

> painting and playing another kind of musical instrument. … I found I really like living in China. I don't want to study abroad as others' expected to do… Fortunately, since the second semester of Yr1, I have been living my own life and have learned to ignore the influence from others. (Nan, F, Yr2)

Participants of the non-mainstream sub-group asserted that their self-awareness seems to be awakened in the TU context. As Hua concluded,

> TU provides students with this particular environment. Students can have freedom to become anyone they like in this university; and this university will not judge us or stop us, as the traditional universities do. However, if you want to become distinguished from the TUers, you must depend on your own willpower. (Hua, M, Yr2).

5.4 A summary: 'I am…' or 'I should be…'

'Who am I?' is a simple question but difficult to answer. It is simple because 'we take for granted that we are we' (Fromm, 1994 [1941], p.253). It is difficult because 'we are we' tells us almost nothing about who exactly we are. I encountered this dilemma when addressing the question 'who do my students think they are?' My students all declare they are questing for their individuality and an acceptable life at TU. They want to find and to be themselves and they think TU provides enough freedom and encourages them to become who they would like to be(come). I believe they do have these strong desires and they are taking action that they believe can contribute to the accomplishment of their goals. Many of my participants' accounts, however, demonstrate that they seem not to know what exactly they want to be and their perceptions of being a TUer are constructed in the processes of adaptation to the TU mainstream culture and the social reproduction of that culture.

When they first came to TU, my students easily figured out the differences in their life at TU through comparison with their own previous educational

experiences and that of their former classmates in traditional Chinese universities, and identified that they are different from their past self – Chinese high school students - and their former classmates now as Chinese college students. They are TUers. They describe TUers as the embodiment and the transmitters of the mainstream TU culture. They reported they learned what TU culture is from the existing TUers they met when they first came to TU. They found TU culture is full of 'freedom'. TU allows students to form multiple goals - for example, to become excellent students as the role models presented by TU and those brother/sister learners admired by other students, or to successfully apply for a position in a highly-ranked world university for their master's study. Being TUers, either the mainstream or the non-mainstream, they are given enough freedom and space to fulfill their personal goals. They consider this as one advantage and characteristic of being TUers compared with being college students of traditional Chinese universities. In this respect, my students would like to pass on – as transmitters – such TU culture to the newcomers coming to TU after them. After another new cohort of students entered TU, some of my students reported they played a similar role as their brother/sister learners did to them – to share their learning and living experiences – and helped the newcomers to form their personal goals in TU.

As TUers, my students enjoy the freedom in TU, and they are even proud of the colourful life they are living at TU and the aspirations they are expecting to accomplish in the future using the space TU provides for them. Their accounts seldom reveal they challenged the identity/role given by TU – to be a TUer. Although seven of the 45 participants mentioned they withdrew themselves from the mainstream TUers, they did not – perhaps could not - provide details about exactly how different they wanted to be from the mainstream. Rather, their self-withdrawal resulted from their worries about that they could not spend all their time on their studies to accomplish their goals at TU, if they continued to belong to the mainstream TUers. In their eyes, the mainstream are those who have forgotten their personal goals as students but spend much time on 'play' rather than on 'study'. Both the

mainstream and the non-mainstream do not leave the main path that TU leads them to – to become excellent TUers – whatever this means to individual students.

Regarding what being a TUer is, many students tend to split their identity as a TUer into an academic half and a non-academic half, based on the norms and values they have constructed in their previous learning dispositions. Specifically, either as a British academic and a Chinese non-academic half or a Chinese academic and a British non-academic half in TU, they identify and explore their self by differentiating their previous learning dispositions from the dispositions TU expects them to form, and looking for similarities and differences between them. Either in academic or non-academic aspects, the British half refers to the new dispositions they think TU expects them to form, while the Chinese half constitutes the previous dispositions as students that they retain in TU. Their descriptions of these two halves cannot get round their expectations of their personally acceptable role/identity – being a 'good' student. The two (Kong, F, alumna; Xing, M, Yr2) who tend to see the identity of being a TUer as a single entity rather than splitting it into academic and non-academic halves also limit their views within their dispositions as a student. Kong comments that all modern college students are foreign/Westernised because they are all engaged in the mainly Westernised modern higher educational structures. Xing bases his statement 'TUers are treated as human beings in the first place' on what he sees as his simple right as a student – to question the textbook and teachers without being punished. It is understandable, as Burke and Stets (2009) argue, that person, role and society are difficult to disentangle when studying an individual's identity. Fei Hsiao-tung's (1992[1947]) statement that there is not a self beyond one's social roles as Chinese people or one's self cannot be separated from one's social roles (see detailed discussions in section 2.1.4) can also explain why my students perceived their identity within their role as TUers.

Data in this chapter leads to a conclusion that what my students are doing is mainly trying to live up to TU expectations and following what their previous dispositions as students guide them to do. One participant Wei (M, Yr4) seems to have realised some inklings of the influence of his existing dispositions. He doubted whether what he thought were the correct things *he* thought or the happy moments he felt were really what *he* thought and felt, or just his responses to what he was used to thinking and feeling in a way that others expected him to do. In this respect, he accused his existing dispositions, especially those he formed in his previous school experiences, of threatening his capacity for thinking and feeling. He, however, claims that what TU is doing is in opposition to the effects of his previous schools. TU provides students with space to think, and he has figured out what he really wants to do – to study and work in the U.S.A., because he is told that people there believe in individualism and he will thus acquire real freedom there.

Chapter VI. How do my participations construct their identity?

6.1 An overview: the diagram guiding my analysis

Drawing on Archer's identified 'modes of reflexivity', a theoretical framework of how my participants formed their identity is mapped as shown in Figure 6.1. Different from Archer's empirical works (2003, 2007a), in my research, the 'concrete point of reference for the discussion of reflexivity (Archer, 2003, p.4) is students' self-perception in their identity formation in TU. My participants may not conform to the four modes embodied in Archer's empirical research, because their identities are evolving over time, which makes it different from the relatively stable theme of 'occupational concern' in Archer's research. A dominant mode is not adequate to explain such an evolutionary process, but the transitional process(es) among the four modes may provide a better approach to the discussion of identity formation. Meta-reflexivity motivates my students to practice their internal conversation in seeking an adjustment to TU. The communicative and/or autonomous modes guide them to make their way through their life trajectories at TU and lead them to a temporarily stable habitus. They may also return to practice self-reflection in the meta-reflexive mode and readjust themselves for a different task.

Habitus, in my research, constitutes a temporarily stable state. When my students accomplish their 'task(s)' of some moment, they will enter this state and live their social life there for a while. In the meantime, their reflexivity will continue to lead them to prepare for the next state.

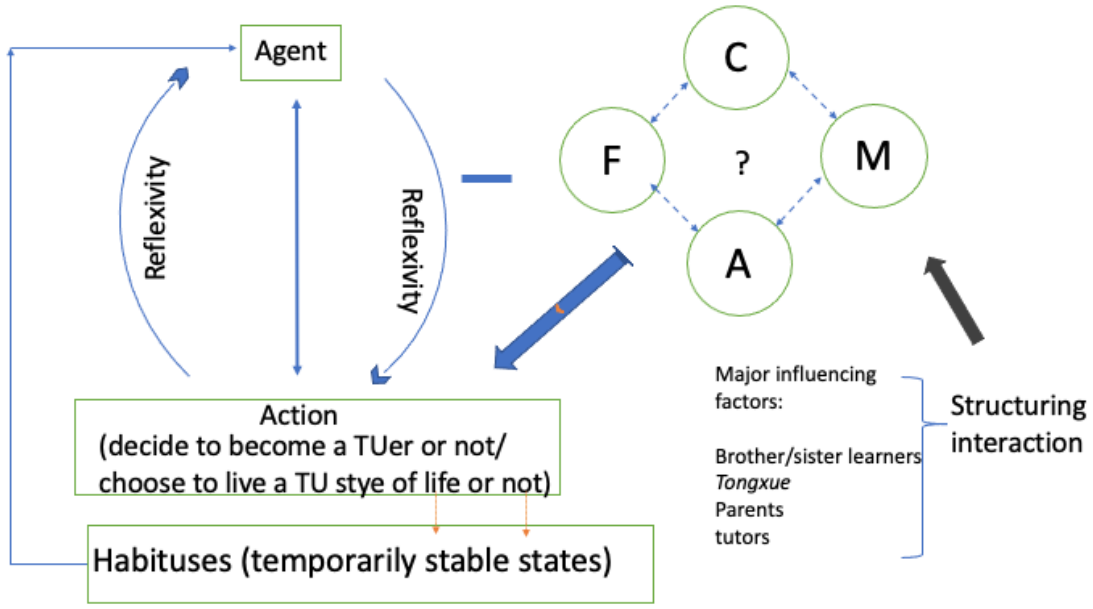

Figure 6.1 How does agency and structure interact within one participant
Keys: A – Autonomous reflexivity; M- Meta reflexivity; C- Communicative reflexivity; F- Fractured reflexivity

This framework consists of two major parts. The left part illustrates the interaction between participant (agent) and action (decide to become a TUer or not/ choose to live a TU style of life or not) through agential power (reflexivity). Drawing on Archer's (2003, 2007a) identification of reflexivity as the personal power that mediates agency and structure in social contexts (see section 2.1.5), I place reflexivity as being the core of this process.

Reflexivity is a process internal to agents (Archer describes this process as 'internal conversation') that guides their courses of action. The particular courses of action on which my research focuses are how the participants make decisions as to who they are going to become and form a corresponding habitus over their time at university. This habitus might constitute a temporarily stable state of who they are in certain period of time and context because identity itself is fluid and developing over an individual's entire lifespan, as I discussed earlier (see p. 13 in section 1.2.2). My research reports on these students' perspectives of 'who do they think they are and how have they become their self?' at the certain moment when they were interviewed. My participants' interview accounts demonstrate

they face two opposite choices in terms of who they are going to become at TU: to belong to the 'mainstream TUers' group and their culture, or to withdraw from the majority and establish an alternative identity (see section 5.3.3).

The right-hand part of the framework displays the interrelationships between the four types of reflexivity proposed by Archer (*op. cit*.), meta reflexivity (M), communicative reflexivity (C), autonomous reflexivity (A) and fractured reflexivity (F) and how the four types of reflexivity may play a part in mediating my participants' identity formation.

The role of the structural interaction in TU life in terms of my students' identity formation is not ignorable (see the right-hand corner on Figure 6.1). In the mediatory process, in this thesis, the structural interaction refers to the external influences from the existing students in TU (my students call them 'brother/sister learners'), peers (former in high school and current at TU) and their parents and tutors (see detailed discussion in section 3.8.2).

6.1.1 'Modes of reflexivity' not 'reflexives'

Archer's four modes of reflexivity (see pp. 39-43 in section 2.1.3) is an effective thinking tool for me to understand my students' self-reflection and analyse their identity formation process, but her approach to justifying the four modes of reflexivity by correspondingly identifying four categories of people (reflexives) is limited. Archer has realised this potential limitation and reminds us of five unanswered questions, such as 'Did further modes of reflexivity remain to be detected?' and 'Were these four modes mutually exclusive or overlapping?' (see detailed discussion on p.37 in section 2.1.3) In my research, her modes of reflexivity are used to describe and discuss thinking modes of my students in their identity formation at different stages. Since my students – the research subjects – never stop growing in TU nor reflecting their identity, the dominant mode of reflexivity in Archer's hypothesis is not effective. In my research, however, each mode cannot be

totally displaced when any one other turns to be the dominant mode in a particular situation. Additionally, since identity formation is a complex and evolving process, Archer's limited categories of reflexives are not helpful in investigating who my students think they are. A dynamic and interactive framework based on Archer's typology of reflexivity is necessary in my research to describe my students' thinking in terms of their identity formation in university. My students will not be categorised into Archer's four categories of reflexives (that is, four categories of people), but her categories of reflexivity are used here as an analytical device.

This is done firstly because the four categories in Archer's studies (2003, 2007a) emerge from and are distinguished based on her subjects' 'occupational concerns and types of social mobility' (2007a, p.4), which are the foci of her research. These, however, are not my students' concerns; my thesis examines college students' identity formation, which is fluid and complex and defies categorisation as four types. Nevertheless, sharply cutting a line between 'modes of reflexivity' and categories of people as four types of 'reflexives' in Archer's discussions of reflexivity is difficult - possibly impossible - because she constructs her discussion of reflexivity on the basis of these concerns as 'a concrete point of reference' (*ibid*). Since, in common with several other social theorists, Archer argues reflexivity is 'the answer to how the causal power of social forms is mediated through human agency' (*ibid*, p.15), a discussion of reflexivity based on human action is required. In my thesis, although Archer's categorisation of people will not be employed, the entailments in human action in her description will be used to analyse my students' courses of action including their choices to belong to the mainstream TUers or stay in the minority and their self-exploration of who they are going to be in TU.

As a further small but significant point, Archer has pointed to the phenomenon that meta-reflexivity is a characteristic in almost every 'normal' agent (2003, p.255), although this detail does not receive much attention in her work. It does, however, provide a rationale to seek potential

interaction between meta-reflection and the other three modes and employ this interaction to explain how my students' agential powers are applied in their decision-making over who they are aiming to become in TU. Additionally, Archer reports the interplay between communicative and autonomous reflexivity in her research (2003), although her initial intension is to distinguish each mode of reflexivity. She acknowledges that 'time' and 'circumstance' are two leading factors that can trigger autonomous reflexivity from communicative reflexivity. Archer states: 'The time and circumstances have to be right before "autonomous reflexivity" can be put into effect to design one's future life-project.' (*ibid*, p.224). Farat is the case in Archer's research (*ibid*) who delays her autonomous reflexivity until the 'right' time appears[34]. Archer (2003) focuses on her subjects' present states when interviewed rather than the processes of how they started to exercise autonomous reflexivity, while my research focuses on the process. Again, details of the gradual acquisition of self-knowledge of Archer's autonomous reflexive subjects are worth noticing in my research.

The interplay between communicative and autonomous reflexivity clearly takes place amongst my participants in the process of their identity formation. Generally, after determining their ideal goal, all participants tend to start their personal development 'strategy' by observing and learning from the brother/sister learners and relying on other external supports from their parents, tutors and *tongxue* (classmates/schoolmates). This is their first phase, a transitional period from a Chinese high school student to a student of TU, and was commonly identified among my Yr1 participants. Every participant must have experienced this phase when they first came to TU, although relative memories to participants of Yr2 to Yr4 are not fresh. Some participants from the other three years of study talked about their Yr1 experiences and the deep influences from others, such as the brother/sister learners (e.g. Bai, M, Yr4; Lan, M, Yr4; Lu, F, Yr3; Nan, F, Yr2). Bai pinpointed that 'do as what brother/sister learners do' was a 'tradition'

[34] see Farat's case on pages 41-42

amongst Chinese students at TU as I early clarified in section 5.1. In the meantime, Yr2 to Yr4 participants declared that they did not imitate others anymore and have found their particular lifestyles; they tended to make their choice, either belonged to the 'mainstream' TUers or chose to stay in a minority. This reflects they realised they had entered a new phase where they started to practice autonomous reflexivity. And effects of communicative reflexivity mostly come into play in the first phase.

In this respect, Archer's four modes of reflexivity are employed in my thesis as a means of exploring my students' 'thinking patterns' and a theoretical tool in my analysis of their identity formation in TU.

6.1.2 Reflexivity in the 'early days' at TU

As I discussed in Chapter IV, before coming to TU, my students all experienced *Gaokao* and have all formed some learning and living dispositions under the influence of the dominant Chinese cultures. Their previous dispositions are of significance in their choice-making and cannot be ignored in their subsequent identity formation at TU. Accounts of why and how these students came to TU demonstrate that most of them (44 out of 45) were guided by communicative reflexivity because their parents chose TU or they came to TU to meet others' wishes (e.g. Wang, M, Yr1 for his girlfriend). For example,

> My parents like TU and they strongly recommended this university and then I came here. (Guan, M, Yr3)

> This university contacted my parents before *Gaokao*. They succeeded in persuading my parents to like this university. Then, my parents decided I could come here. (Shan, F, Yr1)

Only Zhou's (F, Yr4) accounts reveal the practice of meta-reflexivity. She declared that she decided TU based on her own values rather than depending on others' suggestions. Her action conforms to Archer's

description of meta-reflexivity as an internal conversation focusing on the self rather than external voices (2003).

> I could have gone to Sun Yat-set University [a Project 985 institute], but I didn't because I think TU will provide relatively more academic freedom in learning politics, my major, than traditional Chinese universities in China. (Zhou, F, Yr4)

When my students first arrived at TU, their accounts demonstrate that 'external voices' mainly from their brother/sister learners strongly influenced them. As I described earlier, all my students were involved in Iweek when they first came to TU and brother/sister learners' influences on them came into effect from then on. Lan (M, Yr4) once working as an Iweek leader said passing on TU culture and lifestyle and sharing tips on living and learning at TU with the newcomers was a purpose of organising Iweek and a mission for brother/sister learners (see p. 144 in section 4.2.1). Figure 6.1.2 presents how I perceive modes of reflexivity interacting before and after the students have just come to TU according to their accounts.

M and C on the left-hand on Figure 6.1.2 stands for the dominant mode of reflexivity. Because of less evidence to explore the interaction amongst all four modes of reflexivity before my students came to TU, only dominant mode when my students reflected on why and how they came to TU - as a concrete point of reference- can be elicited from their interview accounts. The right-hand on this figure presents communicative reflexivity as a dominant mode came into effect when my students first entered TU, mediated by the 'external influences' from, for example, their brother/sister learners during Iweek.

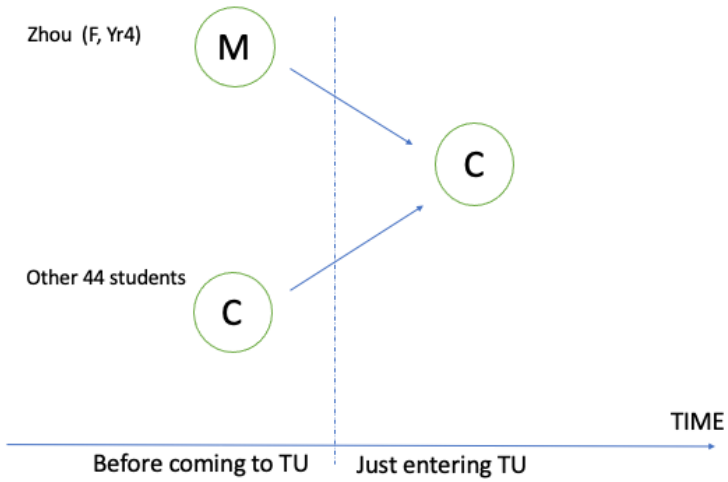

Figure 6.1.2 Modes of reflexivity before and soon after arriving at TU as suggested by my students' accounts

6.1.3 Meta-reflexivity coming into effect

Modes of reflexivity cannot be examined directly because my students' mental activity cannot be read by the researcher. Their spoken accounts are the only way in my research to examine their mental activity and reveal the practice of these four modes of reflexivity and interactions between them. Sometimes, however, what my students profess to think and how they actually act appear to reflect different modes of reflexivity, in particular, meta-reflexivity.

After the initial, explicitly sought and recognised influences from their brother/sister learners, my students reported they switched their attention to listening to and following the brother/sister learners' advice to their own deliberations. They declare that they kept deliberating and deciding their ways to whom they want to become and what life they would like to live in TU. They are attempting to formulate an ideal self and ideal life for themselves as a student at TU. As they were being reflexive about themselves, they also experienced a period when they were critical about the TU context, an ideal context - the British educational environment- where they could quest for their ideal, 'future' self. By Archer's definition the meta-reflexive's internal dialogue aims to be 'critically reflexive about their internal conversation and effective actions in social contexts' (2003, p.93);

in that case, I assume my students' accounts indicate they were engaging in meta-reflexivity after they came to TU.

In Archer's studies (2003, 2007a), those whose dominant mode of reflexivity is meta-reflexivity hold on to values such as their 'faith' or 'happiness' directly related to the self (2003, p.230), and they are idealists in terms of their career, which is the focus in Archer's research. Consequently, meta-reflexivity guides them to insist on questing for an ideal job matching their values, and often leads them to the repeated 'occupational unsettlement and society critique' (p.252) because of a lack of correspondence between their values and the social context.

In my research, however, none of my students reported a similar unsettled or discontented status. According to my students' accounts, there is a set of personal ideals that most of them are pursuing – as Chinese students, 'study' or '*dushu'* is their first mission, so, they long for academic success at TU and to be 'a good student (*haoxuesheng*)'. The ideal self they desire, therefore, seems to be modelled on the 'outstanding' brother/sister learners whom they have known or heard. These brother/sister learners are labelled as 'outstanding' TUers by TU for their success in their academic achievement by obtaining a first-class diploma or winning an offer from Oxford or Cambridge or getting a job offer from a well-known enterprise or organisation or being excellent 'student ministers'. They are admired as role models by my participants at least because they conform to the model of 'a good student' in Chinese educational norms and values. Despite some aspects of TU being seen as very different from both their previous school experience and their image of a 'traditional' Chinese university, they meet congruence in both TU and Chinese constructions of the 'ideal student', which legitimates TU and its judgements of 'quality' in their eyes. My students reported they looked up to these brother/sister learners and expect to learn from them and become excellent as they are.

My participants reported students at TU are free to pursue their idealism. They are confident that TU can play a significant part in moulding them as it did to these outstanding brother/sister learners. The TU context is the 'resources' my participants often mentioned. As they become more familiar with these 'resources', my participants gain confidence in their belief that TU will facilitate the achievement of their value-commitments, which for many had been challenged by their *Gaokao* results. In this respect, in contrast with the negative correspondence between the participants' values and the social context in Archer's research, my participants believe a positive correspondence between their ideals and the TU context can be established. In my research, my students' self-reported meta-reflexivity does not exert the sort of negative influences on their actions that Archer reported for her participants. Rather, this personal power inspires further mental activities (variously of C/A-reflexivity nature) and their accounts of their actions reveal that their self-reported meta-reflexivity turns to be task-oriented which, by Archer's definitions (2003, 2007a), should be a feature of C or A, rather than such M-reflexivity. Figure 6.1.3 presents the role of meta-reflexivity in the transitional period into TU, as suggested in my students' accounts.

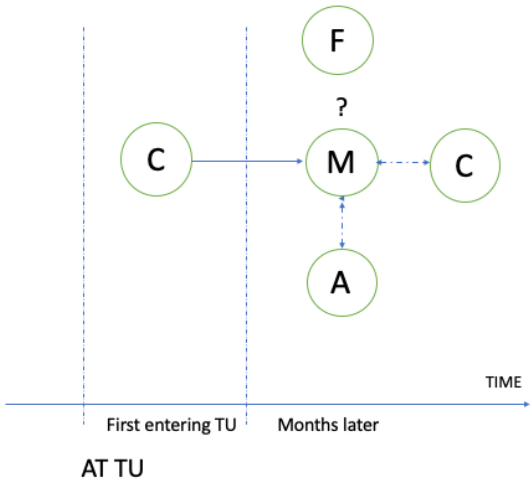

Figure 6.1.3 meta-reflexivity reflected in my students' accounts

6.1.4 A temporary 'fractured' status in transition to TU

I have deliberately left a question mark between M and F reflexivity in Figure 6.1.3 because, firstly, accounts from my students demonstrate that none of them took no action at all – an essential characteristic in Archer's scheme – and became fractured reflexives, those whose decision making was dominated by fractured reflexivity. Rather, after my students set up an ideal goal – become an excellent TUer – when they first came to TU, their accounts reveal what issues they considered and how they prepared for and took steps to try to accomplish their ideal. Briefly, they were guided by action-oriented modes of reflexivity (the mode of C or/and A reflexivity) and they took action. Additionally, my students all declared they finally managed to find a way to live an acceptable life and to be themselves at TU, either as a mainstream or a non-mainstream TUer. In contrast, in Archer's discussion, fractured reflexivity leads to inaction and fractured reflexives are described as being displaced like '[people] who having learned French then find [themselves] in an exclusively German culture and [are] unable to participate, until or unless [they] [begin] to master the new language.' (Archer, 2003, p.298). Secondly, as I have discussed, Archer's account of the fractured reflexivity mode and the examination of the category of fractured reflexives are confusing and, in this case, not helpful in analysing another 'concrete point of reference' - students' identity formation, as is the focus in my research (see section 2.1.3).

Nevertheless, I found some of my students had experienced something of a 'fractured' status in their transition from being a Chinese high school student to becoming a TU student. I borrow the word 'fractured' from Archer's mode of fractured reflexivity to describe that particular period because fractured reflexivity probably came into effect on these students for some particular moments and in some particular situations during their adaptation to TU. Five out of 45 students (Jia, F, Yr4; Nan, F, Yr2; Xing, M, Yr2; Yi, M, Yr2; and Yue, M, Yr1) in particular, did report confusion and contradictions in their identity formation at TU because of a mismatch between their previous

learned dispositions formed in Chinese schools and society and the TU environment they were newly involved in (see section 5.3.2). Their accounts reveal their helplessness at these moments in TU. These students are similar to the 'displaced' people in Archer's analogical example – their previous learned dispositions in Chinese schools are like their acquisition of 'French' while TU, the British academic context, is like 'the exclusively German culture'. In this respect, when they first came to TU, fractured reflexivity inevitably influenced my students' reflections on who they would become and what sort of life they would have in this university. Unlike the fractured reflexives in Archer's discussions, however, although they had experienced a 'fractured' status and discouraging emotions, my students' reports show they were not dominated by fractured reflexivity but somehow managed to negotiate the 'fractured' status. Perhaps, one or multiple modes of action-oriented reflexivity guided their action, but their distance in time from the situation they were recounting made it difficult to 'unpack' their adaptive process at that time.

For example, some students reported thus:

> To be honest, I had regret coming to TU when I was in Yr1. I was always wanting to drop out. … I asked myself why I was not living in a normal university life as those Chinese movies display – riding a bicycle from the dorm to the teaching building in the shade of the avenue at the campus. … But I gradually accepted the new environment. (Nan, F, Yr2)

> I didn't want to come here. I disliked TU, those arrogant students in particular, when I first came here. I refused to take part in any student activities. Later, I met some students sharing the same belief as me and I am happy hanging out with them. (Jia, F, Yr4)

> My Yr1 was full of sad memories. I was confused and pained at that moment. … Later on, I learned from my roommate to calm myself down and know my current competences and the situation I am involved in. (Yi, M, Yr2)

Although fractured reflexivity resulted from some disorienting effects on these students as the quotes express, my students reported a positive outcome caused by other operative modes of reflexivity. Jia's and Yi's accounts suggest they may have practiced communicative reflexivity by seeking others' supports; while Nan's accounts did not indicate how she dealt with fractured reflexivity, but she became adapted to TU context somehow, rather than being 'paralyzed' into inactivity.

Xing (M, Yr2) even went so far as to apply for a year's suspension for a physical and mental repreparation before he returned to TU life. Yue (M, Yr1) talked several times about his disappointment and worries about himself and his life at TU in our interviews and casual conversations. However, the effects of fractured reflexivity on these students did not last long enough to hamper their action towards furthering their identity formation at TU. In contrast, their accounts show that they seldom stopped deliberating about themselves and their life at TU by practicing meta-reflexivity, nor gave up trying out new ways to become a self they wished to be. Their action turned out to be effective and operative, on contrast to the descriptions of Archer's fractured reflexive subjects.

Some students other than these five may also have experienced some disorienting moments when they first came to TU. Some mentioned but understated the challenges they encountered in their adaptation to the TU teaching and learning environment:

> It cost me some time to adapt to the English medium teaching environment in Yr1. (Jiang, F, Yr4)

> I got 21 marks for my first listening test in Yr1. From then on, I practiced my English in the computer room every day and night. Then I passed in the final of Yr1. (Zheng, M, Yr3)

It seems that fractured reflexivity seldom exerted dominant influences on my students nor led them to no action at all. This phenomenon suggests that other modes of reflexivity that contributed to purposeful courses of action and guided my students in times of fractured reflexivity, although they did not provide many details. Their tendencies towards regular meta-reflexivity, revealed in their accounts of later activity may have led my students to keep reflecting on themselves and guided them to make a compromise with their ideals. For this reason, there is a question mark in Figure 6.1.3 between M and F reflexivity because the interaction between M and F is not as simple as one mode impacting on the other. I have insufficient evidence to shed light on how F reflexivity affects my students in detail and how it engages with other modes of reflexivity. I am confident, however, that these students – and not only the five explicitly identified – had experienced fractured feelings and disorienting situations, but they declared they had succeeded in handling these challenges and found their way to live in TU in a way they could accept and which contributed to their identity development.

6.2 Three sub-groups and three patterns

My students are divided into three new sub-groups in order to analyse how they develop their identity at TU, and correspondingly three patterns are created to present each sub-group's identity formation process, drawing on Archer's typology of reflexivity and my participants' interview accounts. Although these three patterns of interplay of modes of reflexivity are created as one outcome of my research, they are not generalised patterns that other Chinese students in TU can be fit into. These patterns merely present that Archer's typology of reflexivity can help to justify and understand how my 45 students form their self at TU.

Sub-group one consists of seventeen[35] Yr1 participants, except Yue. Pattern one presents their identity formation (see Figure 6.2.1). These Yr1 students' interview accounts reveal, when they were interviewed, they stayed in the phase where communicative reflexivity played an important role in guiding their action. In the meantime, they never stopped practicing meta-reflexivity. As I justified in section 6.1.3, their meta-reflexivity formed their ideal at TU – to become an excellent TUer, and continuously reminded them of this ideal. It is true to the other two sub-groups. This phase is significant because these Yr1 participants gradually learned what TU was and built up self-confidence and self-knowledge during this period and decided who they were going to become at TU. It also serves as a precondition for the establishment of autonomous reflexivity. Actually, subtle interaction between communicative and autonomous modes of reflexivity exists during this period. Some accounts of these students reveal that they actually straddled the two modes of reflexivity. Detailed discussed will be found in section 6.2.1.

All twenty-seven [36] participants from Yr2 to Yr4 (plus the alumna) belong to Sub-group two. They had gone through the first phase where communicative reflexivity mainly guided their action and entered the next phase where autonomous reflexivity was put into effect. Students of sub-group two declared that they were determined about their own willingness and decisions rather than just following others' suggestions. The interplay amongst the three modes of reflexivity is illustrated in Pattern two -Figure 6.2.2., presenting their identity formation.

Yue (M, Yr1) is categorised in Sub-group three. Although, when I first interviewed him, he had just been at TU for over a month and was in the

[35] Yr1, F: Yang, Ning, Sun, Fang, Shu, Shan, Ying, Shi, He, Tan, Zhang; M: Guo, Chen, Pan, Xu, Wang, Zhu.

[36] Yr2, F: Nan, Lv, Ren; M: Hua, Yi, Xing, Zhao, Cai.
Yr3, F: Peng, Yuan, Song, Lu; M: Rong, Zheng, Chu, Ma, Guan.
Yr4, F: Jia, Feng, Shen, Jiang, Zhou; M: Lan, Wei, Bai, Ou.
The alumna: Kong.

middle of the transitional period to TU as other Yr1 participants, his accounts manifested he never stopped questioning himself and TU because of his dilemma and confusion: he attempted to learn from the brother/sister learners and other peers meanwhile he doubted about whether imitating others was the right way for his own life. He found it was hard to belong to the mainstream TUers and then he drew a line between himself and the alleged 'mainstream'. His identity formation at TU is guided in a more complex interplay amongst modes of reflexivity and is illustrated in Pattern three - Figure 6.2.3. Although I call the third model of interaction between modes of reflexivity in Yue's identity formation a 'pattern', it is technically one single 'case' or 'story', but this case/story is different and cannot be well fitted in the other two patterns. That is why I need another model to depict it (see section 6.2.3).

My description and justification of my students' identity formation are also based on four concrete points – my students' relationships with their brother/sister learners, tutors, *tongxue* (classmates/schoolmates) and their parents. Archer defines reflexivity as agents' 'regular exercise of the mental ability … to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa' (2007a, p.4). In my research, according to my students' accounts and my observation, the main social contexts in their university life reflect in these relationships. So, these relationships in different stages are used as concrete points of reference to investigate how they negotiated between their agential powers and TU structures.

6.2.1 Pattern one – transition to TU

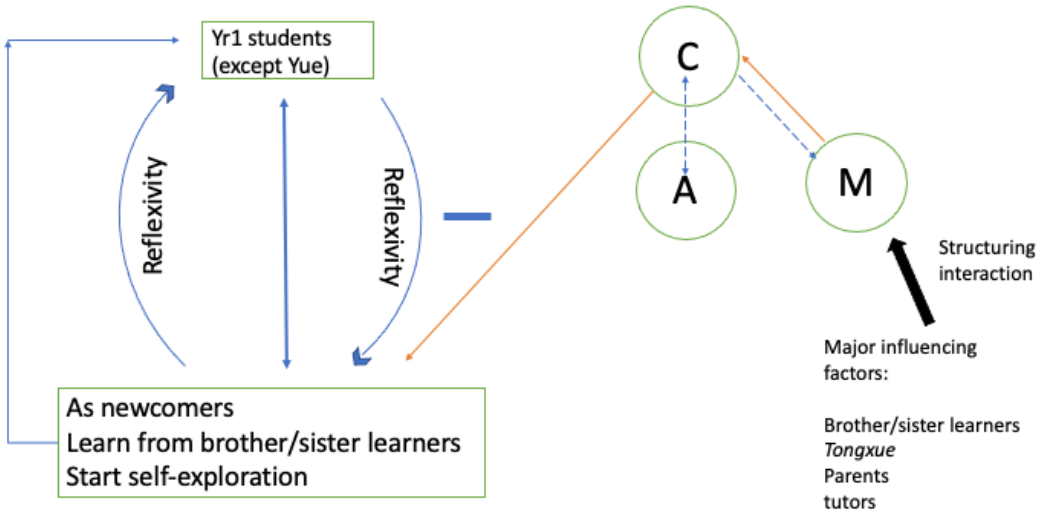

Figure 6.2.1 Interaction of modes of reflexivity in most Yr1 students' identity formation

Actions of participants of sub-group are mainly guided by meta- and communicative reflexivity. But this does not mean they never step into the autonomous reflexive mode because their accounts reveal that it is hard to completely distinguish their communicative and autonomous modes of reflexivity in these students' actions.

Students of sub-group one are referred to as 'children' (*xiaopengyou*) by their brother/sister learners partly because they are relatively younger and partly because they are 'innocent' newcomers to TU with limited information about this university; like 'children', they step into a learning process in TU. These students would like to embrace the TU cultures by actively participating in various activities and programmes they can find at TU - including joining in my research interviews - for they are open to learning new things surrounding them. Details of their experiences have been presented in section 4.2 and are not repeated here, where the focus is on how their internal conversations guide them to make their way through this stage.

M<–>C is the first stage that this sub-group has experienced. Meta-reflexivity directs them to an ideal goal of becoming successful and

accomplishing academic achievements as the brother/sister learners have done – to strive to become excellent TUers, as I clarified in section 6.1.3. Because they were new to TU and had little knowledge about this university, participants in this sub-group tended to observe and learn from others in order to accomplish this ideal goal. Their accounts demonstrate in this phase they mainly depended on their communicative reflexivity to establish connections with those from whom they can get information and supports. 'Thought and talk' constitutes the practice of communicative reflexivity (Archer, 2007a, p.159). Briefly, in Archer's research, communicative reflexives tended to share their deliberations with friends and family and ask for their confirmation or suggestions. In my research, similarly, my students of this sub-group mainly depended on supports from the brother/sister learners, tutors, *tongxue* and their parents.

Nevertheless, autonomous reflexivity emerged in this stage too. Interplayed with communicative reflexivity, it helped students of sub-group one to form their own plans and caused them to keep questioning whether all external suggestions were useful enough to follow without questioning or modifying for their own plans. For example, Tan (F, Yr1) took the course of Chinese Cultures seriously, although her sister learners suggested she should pay little attention to it because it was unrelated to students' final academic result. Tan considered since she would work in China after she graduated, it was not bad for her to have more knowledge about Chinese cultures. Detailed discussion of how modes of reflexivity interacted in these students' identity formation will be found in the following four sub-sections.

Connection with brother/sister learners

'The brother/sister learners' – a term frequently on the lips of students of this sub-group - usually refers to those who are presented by TU as the successful students and regarded by TU students as role models or those existing students who can at least provide information that these newcomers need. My students of this sub-group reported they would like to learn from and even become those successful brother/sister learners (see section

6.1.3). Some of my participants even started to contact with some role models before they came to TU. Fang (F, Yr1), for example, told me: 'Before coming here, I knew a very excellent sister learner graduating from TU and now she is studying at Cambridge University. I hope I can become someone like her.' Many students of this sub-group heard stories of these role models when they first came to TU. For example, Zhu (M, Yr1) was deeply inspired by the stories of these outstanding brother/sister learners and expressed his admiration of those who had got offers from top overseas universities, when he first came to TU. He told himself to learn from them and aspired to imitate them in his own future study. These successful stories reinforced Zhu's expectation of TU because he attributed the senior students' success to the impact of the TU environment.

> Our university does provide many good resources and opportunities to us. These brother/sister learners have made good use of these resources and become so successful. I hope I can learn from them. (Zhu, M, Yr1)

The 'senior' learners also play a role of information providers to these Yr1 students. After starting their academic journey at TU, participants of this sub-group were aware that they did not have sufficient knowledge about the new environment and lacked self-confidence in making academic plans and successfully dealing with academic challenges. So, they tended to turn to the senior learners, not just for information but also for advice. Pan (M, Yr1) turned to them for advice on his academic assignment because he was not sure whether the instructions that he had been given in the classroom were sufficient to complete it. Zhang (F, Yr1) borrowed one brother learner's notebook and referred to it while preparing for the mid-term exam of one course. Shu (F, Yr1) and Chen (M, Yr1) followed the brother/sister learners' suggestion to start to attend extra classes of Advanced Mathematics from Yr1 for her major transfer to economics in Yr2.

Nevertheless, asking for help from the brother/sister learners is not always effective and helpful. Fang (F, Yr1) was confused about what academic plan

she should make, such as when she should start to prepare for IELTS or 'which professional certificates are worthwhile to obtain'. Lacking self-confidence, she turned to some sister learners for advice. She, however, admitted the suggestions she got did not help her but confused her instead, because different sister learners gave different information and she had no idea whose suggestion she should follow. It is clear that consulting the senior students was guided by her communicative reflexivity, but she did not just follow others without reflecting her own communicative reflexivity by practicing meta-reflexivity. Such practice resulted in her confusion. And she was forced to make her choice from diverse and contradictory information. Autonomous reflexivity came into effect to her choice-making.

Meta- and autonomous reflexivity also came into effect to Xu's judgement of the senior students' advice and his decision-making on how much advice he should follow. Meta-reflexivity led him to keep reflecting his deliberations and autonomous reflexivity guided him to his action-taking. Xu's (M, Yr1) comment on attending 'academic sharing sessions' convened by the brother/sisters was that 'more is not better', because he found information and advice given by them was too general and often repetitive. For him, too-frequent participation in such sessions as some other Yr1 students did was a waste of time. By comparing and evaluating the information and advice he got from others, Xu gradually acquired some self-knowledge and succussed in scheduling his own university life. His accounts demonstrate his practice of meta- and autonomous reflexivity.

> Now (January 2018, three months after he entered TU) I rigorously follow my own schedule. During weekdays, I spend all my time on academic study while at weekends I relax myself by watching videos on YouTube or reading novels. I am not the one in a muddle and seeking for advice everywhere as I first came here anymore.
>
> Too many senior students and peers consider learning IS will do no good to our future career. At first, I dare not stay in this school but considered

> transferring to Business School next year. Later, I found I like it. I will do a master's study in IS. (Xu, M, Yr1)

Tan's (F, Yr1) attitude towards the senior learners' suggestions was similarly critical. On the one hand, she gradually learned about the TU culture from the brother/sister learners during Iweek and by attending sharing sessions. On the other hand, she identified and selected useful information for her own way of life at TU. For example, although Tan learned that *shua ye* (stay up late at night, see section 4.2.1) may constitute a major part of leisure life of TUers according to some of her sister learners, she would rather choose jogging as her leisure activity because it was healthier than the sister learners' way of life at TU.

The brother/sister learners are also sometimes regarded as a 'potential resource' for future use; Chen (M, Yr1) is one example of this deliberate accumulation of social capital, or 'connections'. He regarded establishing connections with the brother/sister learners as a significant part in his university life trajectory:

> Good social connections with them will make my life in university easier because in case I encountered any trouble in the future, they would help me out. (Chen, M, Yr1)

Chen is consciously making use of external resources, even if their value is anticipated rather than immediate. His awareness and desire to become an active agent in his own life trajectory, a type whom Archer (2003) describes as one 'who makes things happen' rather than waiting for 'things just [to] happen' (p.224), is clear. In the meantime, Chen maintained that it is impossible for Yr1 students to figure out everything happening around them in this university, and consulting those more experienced was necessary and efficient. His practice is engaging in communicative reflexivity by relying on external resources in this phase. Meanwhile, autonomous reflexivity exerts its effect on his deliberations and probably waiting for the 'right' time and

circumstance to come into play. Xu's accounts demonstrated that the practice of meta-reflexivity also never ceased because he had already planned his Malaysian overseas programmed in winter vacation that would take him closer to the life in those senior students' suggestions and to his ideal of being a TUer.

Connection with Parents

Parental support is significant to all my participants, in particular, to Yr1 students when they adapted to the transition to TU. Different from American college students in Arnett's description of 'emerging adulthood' (2000), these Chinese college students seem to continue depending on their parents to some extent and they valued highly support from their families. This phenomenon is commonly identified as a characteristic of Chinese society, in which, the family is at the center (Zhai, 2017); influences from the family pervade almost the entire life amongst Chinese people as I discussed in section 2.1.4.

Archer (2003) also discusses parental influences on practicing reflexivity in Farat's case. She emphasises Farat's Asian-family background which leads to 'traditional' notions of sustaining the social continuity (*ibid*, p.230). Farat's father monitored her life and made decisions for her in terms of her future occupation according to these traditional notions. Archer (2003) argues that Farat's experience in this phase constrained her autonomous reflexivity to put into effect. Her analysis (*ibid*) seems to imply that in this case parental influences deferred the practice of autonomous reflexivity. The role of this attachment with parents in my research, however, is different from that in Farat's case of Archer's research (2003). To my students, sub-group one in particular, consultation with their parents was necessary in some aspects of their life at TU; and this attachment to parents did not hamper my students in building self-confidence. Conversely, some students had been aware of the importance of the independence in the personal development in university. For example, Ning (F, Yr1) and Shi (F, Yr1) both

maintain that going to university means leaving their comfort zone and familiar environment to see a new world.

Some Yr1 students reported that their parents helped them to choose this university, their current major and even plan to help them transfer to another school of TU in the second semester (e.g. Chen, M, Yr1; Xu, M, Yr1; Shan, F, Yr1; Tan, F, Yr1). Although some did not mention who decided to choose TU and their majors, depending on the university enrollment scheme in China and relationships between parents and children, it is likely that their parents made or strongly influenced decisions for many of them (Guo, 2019; Lu, 2019). Parental involvement with their children's lives – certainly – when they are still teenagers tends to be a cultural norm in China, and students largely seem to take this norm for granted (Feng, 2020; Zhang, 2010). Accordingly, this norm nurtures a communicative mode of reflexivity amongst students, and its effects will last for a period of time after they come to university.

On entering TU, many students were faced with a sudden 'freedom' from their parents' influence. It was hard for some students to adapt to this change at first. Fang (F, Yr1) admitted she missed her previous life under the tutelage of her parents. Similarly, Wang (M, Yr1) argued that some surveillance from parents and teachers was 'necessary' for Chinese students when they first entered a completely new environment. The extent of the individual student freedom at TU was beyond his expectations and shocked him. He even panicked and was worried about what he would become over four years of living at TU; his worries permeated almost the whole interview. In this respect, accepting communicative reflexivity guided by dependence on parents' suggestions may well facilitate a relatively smooth adjustment to life at TU.

Sun (F, Yr1) believed in following her parents' advice because: 'the information and advice they give to me is what they consulted from the authorities.' For example, she would transfer from the 2+2 programme to

the 4+0 programme because: 'my mom considered it was not worth spending two years in the UK to learn engineering, in view of all courses being the same with those at TU.' In her daily life, Sun also tended to follow her parents' advice. She washed her clothes every day because: 'my dad taught me to wash my clothes every day, because of the humidity in south China.' Pan (M, Yr1) reported he often talked with his parents and shared his life and study experiences at TU with them. He followed his parents' advice to join the Party because: 'my parents think being a member of the Party will give me some advantages over those who are not. I think it is true.'

Conversely, some students' attitudes towards participating in university life without parents' surveillance were positive. They valued going to university as an opportunity to live a life away from their previous familiar environment. Shi (F, Yr1) enjoyed living her life away from her parents, at least partly because she considered independence as a necessary quality for her to become an entrepreneur in the future. She noted: 'I will probably run my own business after graduation. Venturing out to the outside world is the best practice.' Living a life without parents' supports did not bother Ning (F, Yr1) either. She stated that 'going to university does mean an escape from our old life'. Ning described how, 'I phone my mum almost every day… but we seldom communicate. Every time I just tell her I am coming back to my dorm safe and sound.' Significantly, she points her parents had always encouraged her to be independent. Tan (F, Yr1) and Zhu (M, Yr1) are local students, meaning that they remained spatially 'close' to their parents on their move to university, but they consciously reduced parental attachment and gradually developed a sense of greater autonomy guided by autonomous modes of reflexivity. Zhu noted: 'Although I am not a real adult now, at least I am independent from my mum's care after going to university.' Tan defined herself as a 'not obedient' child and she insists: 'I will never accept my parents' disagreement with my decisions…. My dad wants me to work as a teacher in the future, but I will not choose to become a teacher as he expects…. I will try something new.'

Some participants seemed to be good at negotiating between the practice of both communicative and autonomous modes of reflexivity. On the one hand, they knew they needed to rely on their parents' material support in their daily life; on the other hand, they consciously strived for more autonomy and nurtured as much autonomous deliberation as they could. Ying (F, Yr1) tended not to argue with her parents - 'I will listen to what my parents are saying carefully' - but she may decide not to follow their commands or suggestions, perhaps after evaluating them: 'I do not think what they are telling me is all correct.' She gave an interesting example, however, that suggests more of a willfulness simply to reject and oppose: 'If my mum warns me not to make friends with a boy, I will definitely try my best to get along well with him.' There is a deeply influential norm to consult parents as I earlier discussed, but here we have an instance of a member of the so-called 'post-90s generation' deliberately starting to challenge this tradition.

Chen (M, Yr1) and Zhang (F, Yr1) both declared they had grown up in a 'democratic' family. Chen described the relationship with his parents in this way: 'We are like friends…. When encountering disagreement with me, although they will try to persuade me, they will never force me to obey.' Zhang defined herself as a person insisting on having her own ideas and her parents would often encourage and support her if she was determined. Both Chen and Zhang realised, however, that this was not the right time to be completely independent from parents' support - at least not financial support. Chen reported he was negotiating with his parents about an overseas volunteer programme. He hoped his parents would financially support him. 'My dad has agreed. I think my mum will probably agree too.' As Archer (2003) argues, autonomous reflexivity will tend to come into practice at appropriate times and in appropriate circumstances. At this stage, communicative reflexivity seemed to be salient in Chen's deliberation over his plan to participate in this volunteer programme, if only because of his financial dependence on his parents.

Zhang (F, Yr1) said she would contact her parents twice or three times a week, and she admitted: 'The probability of [my] asking for living costs when I call them is approximately 70 to 80%.' It seems that continued financial dependence leads to Zhang's autonomy deficiency. In many Chinese families, children will be financially supported when they are studying in university, and even when they start to work after graduation; parents and children tend to take such financial support for granted. In return, children are expected to show filial respect to their parents, and one aspect in such respect is to listen to parents' suggestions. With this cultural background, it is easy to understand why Shan (F, Yr1) wished to become financially independent as soon as possible. 'I really hope to do anything as I wish. But now I am spending too much of my parents' money. I will feel guilty if I do so.' On the one hand, however, Shan maintained her parents had been greatly interested in her university life. 'My parents have followed my roommates' WeChat. And they ask my roommates via WeChat about what I am doing.' On the other hand, she noted she could understand why her parents did so. 'Parents spend much money on their children's education. They need to ensure children are working hard.'

Connection with tutors

Another important factor contributing to the use of communicative reflexivity amongst participants of this sub-group is a habit of students' dependence on teachers/tutors. On the one hand, it seems that these students have retained such a learning disposition formed in their previous school experiences. On the other hand, the newcomers lacked sufficient information about the academic context at TU and they needed to rely on their tutors for solving academic related problems.

Some Yr1 participants seemed not to consciously use autonomous reflexivity in the process of forming their role as TUers. Instead, they tended to do what their tutors demanded of them, without questioning it. The result is a form of dependency which prevents them taking charge of their own

academic arrangements. Tan's account shows that she had no learning plan of her own but did only what her tutors suggested students might do – even if this was not presented as being compulsory.

> Apart from attending these courses, I only do my homework assigned by tutors. This homework is usually not compulsory but just some background readings. (Tan, F, Yr1)

In this respect, Tan maintained that TUers were given too much free time. Her accounts suggest she was not just doing 'the compulsory minimum' but was looking for ways to fill her unused time with something that is academically useful. To identify what is 'useful', however, she was reliant on the tutor's suggestions. In Archer's typology, Tan's action was mainly guided by her communicative reflexivity.

Wang (M, Yr1) provided an interesting and extreme example of the sort of dependency. He maintained that as a student, tutors' expectation and demands would decide his academic performances to some extent. 'Our tutor told us his/her expected mark of this course to us was 40. As a result, my mark is 70…. I am not happy with this mark…I think if his/her expectation could be much higher, I would get 90 or better.' Although Wang's accounts may not reveal which modes of reflexivity he was practicing according to Archer's typology, he did think about what was happening to him in that particular situation.

Although these newcomers tended to retain their previous learning dispositions, they soon realised that it was difficult to fully rely on tutors as they did in high school. Moreover, without practicing autonomous reflexivity, they seemed unable to accomplish their ideal goal of become a successful TU student as the brother/sister learners have done. Zhu (M, Yr1) noted that in high school, he did not need to make choices of what to do next because teachers would arrange everything well in advance for students to follow; but at TU, he had to choose from a variety of events and programmes

only informed by the university via a number of emails almost every day. He had to force himself to think and make decisions on his own, which refers to his autonomous reflexivity, although this left him feeling tired.

Conversely, some Yr1 students consciously exercised autonomous reflexivity in their academic life. For example, Guo declared he preferred thinking to cramming.

> If I was studying in a Chinese university, I think tutors would remain their role as leading students in classroom while fortunately tutors at TU let students do discussion on their own and encourage independent thinking. (Guo, M, Yr1)

Similarly, Xu (M, Yr1) realised TU aims to form students to be independent by providing them with greater personal freedom. He thinks tutors of TU deliberately give sufficient space to students; they do not play an authoritative role to command students to complete their academic tasks but mainly to facilitate and inspire students. Thus, Xu purposefully practiced autonomous reflexivity in preparation for academic life at TU. It is the time and circumstance to awaken Xu's autonomous reflexivity.

> Tutors will not impose their opinions on us. They just share their opinions and clarify that these are only personal opinions. … I know students complain that tutors do not teach much, but I think … if you do not do pre-readings required by tutors, you will never learn from their teachings. I have realised you should not fully depend on tutors' teaching, but you should rely on yourself. (Xu, M, Yr1)

Connection with tongxue

As I early clarified (section 5.1), the role of *tong xue* (classmates/schoolmates) in my participants' identity formation process resembles mirror-like function, in which my participants see the images of themselves, either similar or different. For example, taking his roommates

as a referent, Wang realises differences in university life between his and others'.

> My roommates often complain they are tired with doing tasks for the student society they have taken part in. But I feel their words are showing they have a sense of achievement. I am not accepted by any significant societies like them but only a small hobby group. Then, I realise I may never have 'jobs' or 'colleagues' as they have in university. I envy them. (Wang, M, Yr1)

Apart from comparing with their current *tongxue*, the former *tongxue* are also referred to as referents, especially when my students talked about their university lives. Specifically, these students seemed to depend on such comparisons to confirm that education provided by TU and life in TU are really different from that in Chinese traditional universities in China. With little personal experience of living and learning in Chinese traditional universities, these Yr1 students depended on such external confirmations. Archer (2007a) defines deliberation requiring external confirmation as communicative mode of reflexivity; this process can be understood as a way of acquiring knowledge. Without sufficient knowledge regarding TU and their own preferences, the practice of communicative reflexivity is helpful for these Yr1 students. Comments such as these are found in their accounts: 'My former *tong xue* must participate in compulsory 'self-study' sessions every night, but we do not need to. … I prefer independent learning that our university encourages.' (Guo, M, Yr1) and 'Those (former) *tong xue*… are pushed to work as hard as in their previous lives in high school. Compared with them, we have much freedom.' (Zhang, F, Yr1).

Comparison seems to be adopted as a way of learning the TU context and self-exploration for some students of this sub-group. In the meantime, in comparison, these students inevitably practiced meta-reflexivity because the process of comparison is closely linked with their deliberations on their self and TU and others and others' university life.

6.2.2 Pattern Two - personal development in TU

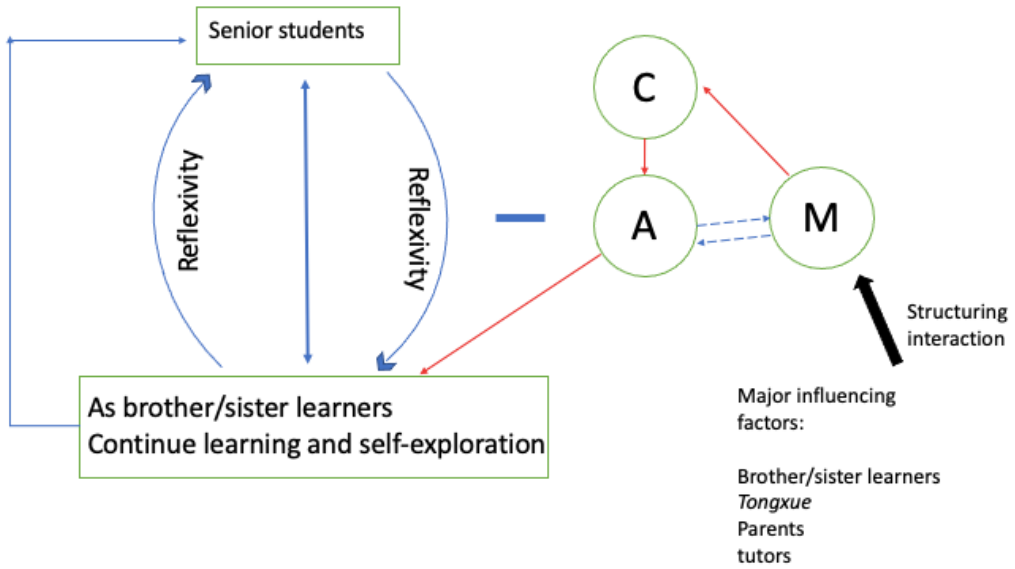

Figure 6.2.2 Interaction of modes of reflexivity in senior students' identity formation

All 26 senior students, including Yr2 to Yr4 participants plus the one alumna (Kong), belong to sub-group two. Their identity formation at TU is presented in Figure 6.2.2. Their self-exploration was mainly directed by autonomous reflexivity in this phase. Nevertheless, their accounts revealed that the practice of autonomous reflexivity based on the information and experiences they gathered by seeking from external resources, such as communicating with their brother/sister learners, tutors, *tongxue* and parents, although these external influences became weaker on decision-making of students of sub-group two. Even those Yr4 students were facing new challenges, for example, where to do a further study, when I interviewed them. Thus, consultation with others for information and advice is necessary and useful for practicing autonomous reflexivity (see details in this section below). In the meantime, reflecting the question of who they would like to become did not pause in this phase. Rather, the senior students told me, based on their knowledge of their self and TU, they had made choices of who they would like to become and what life they would like to live in TU. Briefly, 20 of them would like to maintain the continuity of the TU culture and belong to the

mainstream TUers; 6[37] of them tended to travel a different path from the mainstream; they would like to stay in the minority variously outside the 'TUer model' (see section 5.3.3). Whether the decision was to belong to the mainstream TUers or not, these senior students declared this was their own choice. According to Archer's typology of reflexivity, their choice was made guided by the interplay with autonomous and meta- reflexivity (see details in this section below).

Connection with the brother/sister learners

Comments on 'the brother/sister learners' often emerge in the retrospective accounts of participants in this sub-group. Their brother/sister learners conveyed information about this university and in doing so passed on the TU cultures to them by sharing their experiences. In retrospect, some participants valued the information shared by their brother/sister learners. Guan (M, Yr3) and Zheng (M, Yr3) admitted they and their parents chose TU because the brother/sister learners they knew had introduced this university to them and described how they valued the experiences of learning and living here. Lv (F, Yr2), Lu (F, Yr3), Jiang (F, Yr4) and Zhou (F, Yr2) noted that it was thanks to their brother/sister learners' sharing that they could smoothly make their way through their Yr1 at TU.

Some participants of this sub-group disapproved of what their brother/sister learners had conveyed to them when they looked back on their lives in Yr1. Hua (M, Yr2) and Feng (F, Yr4) regretted following their brother/sister learners' advice that Yr1 students did not need to work hard but should just play, and they admitted they wasted their time in Yr1. They both expressed the view that if Yr1 students asked for their advice, they would warn them to be critical about other brother/sister learners' words. Hua realised, however, that 'no one can think critically and independently when first entering a new environment.' In other words, depending on external advice

[37] Yr2: F: Nan, Lv; M: Hua, Yi. Yr4: Jia (F), Wei (M).

and confirmation of how to face and adapt to a new environment was a necessary process in students' growth.

Wei (M, Yr4) and Xing (M, Yr2) declared they started to doubt and probe the information provided by their brother/sister learners and to redefine the TU context for themselves at the end of their Yr1. They gradually noticed a phenomenon that in order to maintain the continuity of the mainstream TU culture, what their brother/sister learners shared is only about the 'bright' side of this university, that there are many successful brother/sister learners fostered by this university. After Wei failed to imitate a brother learner's life at TU, he found that copying others would not bring him the same result. Rather, he realised that making good use of the information he had acquired would contribute to his own personal development. Although he may not become one of those successful brother/sister learners as in his previous plan, he asserted that through his endeavors and persistence he would become the person he wished to become; and his new orientation was just to be himself. Wei was not a daydreamer; rather, he had a detailed plan for achieving his goal. He planned to take a master's degree in America, a country that in his eyes was built on the individualism he wanted for himself; he believed he would live an independent life, free from external influences there. In the follow-up interview that took place after he had graduated from TU, Wei reported he was studying in the USA and had accomplished this goal. Wei's courses of action conform to Archer's (2007a) depiction of autonomous reflexives: determined and aware of their own goals. Different from those autonomous reflexives (people), however, Wei did not merely practice one dominant autonomous reflexivity. Such mode of reflexivity was triggered by his on-going self-reflection – Archer's meta-reflexivity -, when he reflected on the earlier influences from his brother/sister learners.

In this phase, students of this sub-group practiced autonomous reflexivity rather than just following their brother/sister learners' advice and examples without reflecting on them. Rather, they declared they had decided on their own life-project based on the self-knowledge and the external resources

they had obtained. They changed from trying to become one of the role models, such as those presented on the TU website, to the self they had identified that they truly wished to become. They kept questing for change in their university lives, when they realised copying their brother/sister learners' lives was not feasible, as the autonomous reflexives in Archer's research did (2003, 2007a). If the external resource, 'freedom/free time' is the key word in life of Yr1 participants of sub-group one, 'self/individual' is the one for sub-group two. They were gradually building up internal powers for constructing their self-esteem which is crucial to the development of self-confidence.

Wei (M, Yr4) pursued individualism. Lu (F, Yr3) admitted that in her Yr1, she had followed others and as a result made herself lost; from the second year, she gradually began to decide on what she thought was suitable for herself. Lv (F, Yr2) maintained that if one hoped to accomplish personal aspirations, one should learn to adapt to and embrace 'aloneness', for no amount of external supports can guarantee the accomplishment without one's exclusive focus and commitment on the aspirations. As Archer discusses, autonomous reflexivity is 'indeed a matter of autonomy' (2003, p.211) and will usually lead agents to individualism and aloneness, to some extent (Archer, 2003, 2007a). My participants in this sub-group started consciously to practice autonomous reflexivity and get rid of 'externalization of their internal deliberations' (Archer, 2003, p.215) with their brother/sister learners.

Connection with parents

Participants in this sub-group reported that influences from parents had disappeared from their university lives. Apart from financial dependence on their parents, they believed they were in charge of their own lives. They could decide on who they were going to become and were gradually approaching their goal. For example, Wei (M, Yr4) noted that who he was before coming to university was what his parents expected him to be. When

looking back, he could not even be sure whether the happiness he thought he had before coming to TU was real happiness or what others made him believe he should have. He was, however, clear about his present goal now and had his own plan to pursue individualism as I have discussed earlier. Other participants, such as Jia (F, Yr4), Yi (M, Yr2), Jiang (F, Yr4) and Zhou (F, Yr4), also declared that they could make their own decisions without external supports, and autonomous internal conversations come into play in their lives in this phase. Archer maintains that autonomous reflexivity is 'task-oriented' (2003, p.217). Participants in this sub-group, whether they would like to belong to the mainstream TUers and embrace the TU culture or withdraw from the mainstream and choose to stay in the minority, insisted they had decided on their goals and aspirations, and autonomous reflexivity directed to pursuing them.

Nevertheless, influences from parents actually do not completely vanish; parents are still concerned about their off-springs' further education. My participants admitted they were not allowed to decide on their own which university to apply to and which major to learn for their further, postgraduate study. Some participants maintained that this was because they had to depend financially on their parents. For example, in a follow-up interview, Bai (M, Yr4) admitted that he had to continue to learn Business for his overseas further study to match his parents' expectations, although what he really wanted to study was education, and what he really wanted to be was a teacher rather than a businessman. He gave way to his parents because: 'I have no right to object to their choice because they pay for my tuition fees.' Jia (F, Yr4) encountered a similar situation. She was confident that she would insist on her own decision of which university she would go to for her further study, although she realised that her parents would consider the ranking of a university over her personal interest. In the end, however, she followed her parents' advice. Nevertheless, this type of 'compromise' may not always delay the onset of the practice of autonomous reflexivity. Kong, the alumna, said that she was determined to be an autonomous agent, even when her parents threatened to cut off her

financial support. As a result, Kong succeeded in taking over the management of her life project from her parents' (direct) control. She reported, 'When my parents found I would not give up my own decision, they gave up.'

Connection with tutors

Unlike Yr1 students, those in this sub-group seldom turned to their tutors for confirmations and suggestions. Kong, the alumna, admitted that she seldom attended tutorials from the second year onwards, and she found most of her classmates did so. Jiang's (F, Yr4) comment may provide an explanation of this phenomenon: 'After Yr2, I think we have become very familiar with what British education is and how we can obtain most benefits with least effort'. Self-sufficiency is the characteristic of participants of this sub-group when exploring and developing their self. The need for and dominant impact of communicative reflexivity has faded and been replaced by their autonomous reflexivity.

Connection with tongxue

In these participants' accounts, dependence on comparisons with the situations of their *tong xue* to confirm their own situations and make decisions seldom appear. Instead, both former high school and current TU *tong xue* function as those with whom my participants can share their experiences of their growth. As Jiang (F, Yr4) concluded, 'as we are growing up, we are gradually becoming more self-reliant and independent'. It seems that amongst these participants, transferring from communicative to autonomous modes of reflexivity is necessary and inevitable.

6.2.3 Another 'pattern' – Yue's story

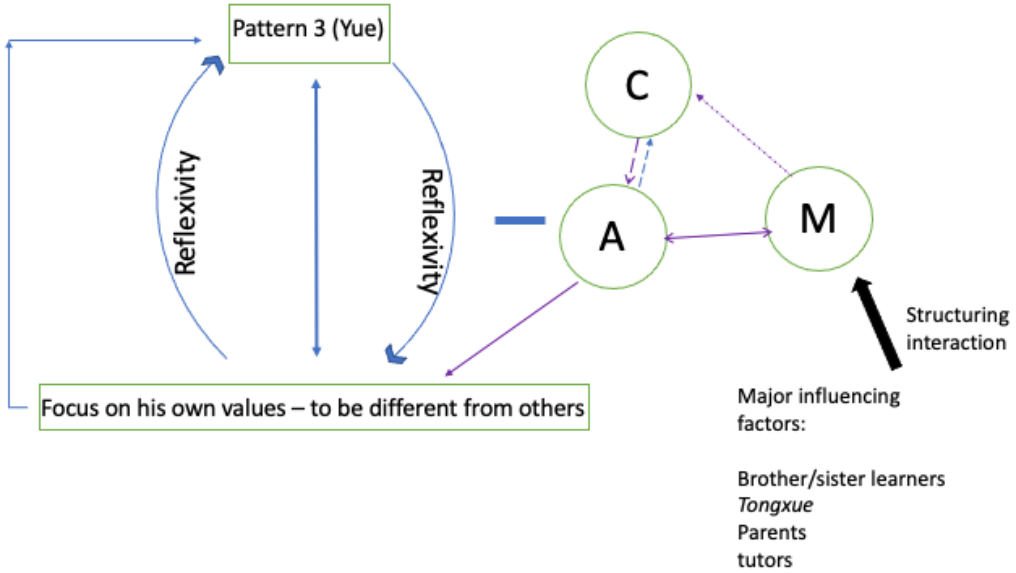

Figure 6.2.3 Interaction of modes of reflexivity in Yue's identity formation

This is not a 'pattern' technically as I earlier discussed. Yue's accounts, however, demonstrate his identity formation did not conform to the other two patterns. In his early days to TU, Yue was not dominantly impacted by communicative reflexivity as other Yr1 participants of sub-group one (pattern one). Autonomous reflexivity seemed not to come into dominant effect in his identity formation process when he became a senior student of TU as other senior participants either. In this respect, a new model of interaction of modes of reflexivity is necessary to depict and explain Yue's identity formation in TU, although it is impossible for me to identify in this research how many students' identity formation process may belong to this pattern.

Yue's interview accounts illustrate the process of his personal development at TU from Yr1 to Yr3. Although he cannot be categorised in the group of meta-reflexives according to Archer's criteria (2003, 2007a), the influences of meta-reflexivity pervade his personal development for these three years. Yue's accounts demonstrated his persistence with his personal goal – to become an excellent TU student as those role models presented by TU and admired by other TU students, directed by meta-reflexivity. In the meantime,

some of his accounts revealed communicative and autonomous modes of reflexivity also developed. Additionally, it is difficult to disentangle Yue's practice of autonomous and meta-reflexivity because to accomplish his ideal goal, Yue needed to continuously practice and reflect between these two modes of reflexivity - meta-reflexivity led to his persistence and autonomous reflexivity directed to steps for him to take for his goal. While communicative reflexivity intertwined with autonomous and meta-reflexivity in Yue. It helped Yue to confirm his own values and aspirations – what he was reflecting in the practice of meta-reflexivity -, on the one hand, and to require information and advice in the preparation for the practice of autonomous reflexivity, on the other hand.

Yue's deliberations developing when he first came to TU

Like other Yr1 participants, Yue also engaged in meta-reflexivity when he came to TU. He was critical about himself and the TU context before deciding on what sort of life he wanted to live and who he would like to become at TU. On the one hand, he acknowledged the external resources he could obtain from TU, such as a British educational experience and successful brother/sister learners as role models. On the other hand, he criticised the learning atmosphere at TU:

> These students spend much time playing rather than studying…. There are a large number of entertainment activities for junior students.

In the meantime, he started to design his life project. He declared he could never bear 'living an ordinary life'.

> I desire success, either to become an entrepreneur like Jack Ma… or to become an expert in one professional field.

To achieve his ideal goal, he decided to come to TU, and expected learning experiences at TU would help him to become a 'successful' person. These assessments of himself and the TU context suggest his acts of meta-

reflexivity. At first, he tried to engage in the mainstream TU culture as many other Yr1 students did. For example, he actively participated in Iweek and applied for positions in some student societies, because he did not want to become 'alienated' in other students' eyes. Perhaps because of a lack of self-knowledge at that time, he tended to depend on external consultations to probe whether he could smoothly join in the mainstream TU culture; his communicative mode of reflexivity was reinforced. He wanted to join in a Student Society called 'Academic Department', but failed. He doubted the truth of the reasons why he was rejected and turned to a sister learner for support. In the meantime, he wanted to evaluate and confirm his own self-knowledge. He showed an ironic smile and said:

> I think I performed well because I was one of a few candidates who passed all rounds of interviews. The result, however, was that they rejected me. A sister learner who was in the interviewer panel told me she thought I did do well, but she had no idea why they did not let me join in this Student Society.

In line with those meta-reflexives in Archer's research, who cannot 'embrace [any context] uncritically and lastingly' (2003, p.258), Yue's criticism of the TU context was frequently found in his accounts. He criticised the mainstream TU culture as 'noisy' and most junior students as 'arrogant'. He declared it was not easy for him to adapt to this environment because 'it is a noisy place… but I am a quiet person.' Yue's meta-reflexivity resumed its effect. He had a strong sense of self-monitoring, and he consciously remained true to his sense of his self. In contrast to Archer's meta-reflexives - 'idealists' who are 'ever seeking for a better fit' (2003, pp.258-259) between 'self' and 'structure', however, Yue's meta-reflexivity contributed to his realisable orientations rather than trapped him in the 'never-to-be-accomplished-ideal' as Archer's subjects. He continued to pursue his personal goal. For example, he planned to apply again for a position in a student society in the next semester, and he wished to attend some activities to strengthen his social connections with his *tongxue* and brother/sister learners at TU. He declared that this was partly because he

would like to practice his communication skills and partly because he realised he needed to get involved in the TU context in order not to behave differently from the others. He was aware of what he desired and tried to make this happen, rather than wait for it to happen. At that stage, his autonomous reflexivity was dominant in guiding him.

Yue's deliberations developing later

The accounts of the follow-up interview and our casual conversations after the first interview during the three years indicate meta-reflexivity is ongoing almost all the time in Yue's personal development. Yue constantly confirmed his ideal goal to become a 'successful' person. His accounts demonstrated he kept reinforcing his ambitions: 'My ultimate goal is to become a top expert in some field.'; 'I want to be known by doing something extraordinary. … [For example,] I do desire to break the long-lasting barriers between working class and middle class in China.'; 'I must push myself to work hard.'; 'I would rather spend time reciting English vocabulary than hang out with others'; 'I hope I will become a graduate of TU whom TU is proud of'; 'I will never do ordinary jobs such as working as a teacher. I am in quest of powers, or wealth, or reputation…. It is very difficult, so I should work very hard.'

Nevertheless, Yue is not an idealist meta-reflexive as those in Archer's research are portrayed (2003, 2007a) because communicative and autonomous modes of reflexivity often emerge in his deliberations, according to his accounts for these three years. He was aware that his goal might be 'a daydream'. 'It is normal that every young person has this sort of goal and daydream. Young people even want to become a hero saving the world.' For this goal/daydream, he kept working hard: 'I encourage myself that as long as I work harder and harder my academic achievements will be as excellent as those of students from Peking or Qinghua university.'

In the meantime, his internal conversations are influenced by his previous educational dispositions, the TU context and the larger social context. Firstly, the Chinese norm regarding the relationship between 'study (*xue xi*)' and 'student (*xue sheng*)' are embedded in Yue's mind. Comments on 'the identity/role of student' are often found in his accounts. Secondly, Yue frequently mentioned the subtle influences from his *tongxue* and brother/sister learners on his own life at TU, although he seemed seldom to establish connections with his tutors. Thirdly, the influences from the larger social context are attributable to his ideal goal to become a successful person with powers or money or reputation. 'I find this world does not work because of love, but powers and money. This is why I chose business as my major.'

6.3 A summary - the individual in society and society in the individual

Although my students' accounts reveal they seem to play a role which TU expects them to play, there is still space provided by TU for their personal agency. Archer's typology of reflexivity provides a useful methodological device to analyse and understand how my students mediate their agential powers within the TU structure.

Since my research is based on cross-sectional data, I cannot depict a full picture of how my students develop and explore their selves in TU. My data only provide scenes at certain brief phases of my students' lives, which emerged from their accounts – before coming to TU, when they first came to TU and some meaningful and significant moments for them in their respective accounts of their life at TU. Nevertheless, in piecing these scenes together, lines of my students' personal development appear.

Before my students came to TU, which modes of reflexivity came into effect and how these modes interplayed in the making of decisions and taking action cannot be fully presented because I lack information. What their

accounts reveal is that the decision by most students to come to TU was made based on their practice of communicative reflexivity because as '*Gaokao* failures', as they labelled themselves, they had no choice to go as they had wished and expected to go, and had to turn to their parents' and teachers' advice for a new possibility. Only Zhou (F, Yr4) declared she chose TU based on her own values – to pursue a relatively free academic environment at TU. Her claim indicates meta-reflexivity came into effect when she made this decision.

When they first came to TU, my students were commonly shocked by the free environment in TU, which was totally different from what they were used to in their previous school experiences. My Yr1 participants shared with me the challenges they encountered in transition and adaptation to TU. Some discouraging experiences also emerged in senior participants' retrospective descriptions of their Yr1 at TU. In such a situation, to adapt to TU, my students reported they turned to external support as much as possible. These accounts demonstrate at that phase they mainly depended on others for information and advice to help their adjustment to TU. It is understandable and necessary that their actions were mainly directed by communicative reflexivity.

Apart from being shocked at these differences at TU, through communication with the senior students, my students also found TU tended to publicise and promote particular values that were not opposed to those in their previous dispositions – TU presented 'excellent' existing TUers to them and encouraged new students to follow these models and become new role models in their turn, but there is continuity between these idealized TUers and their previously held notions of the 'excellent students' in that both were high achieves academically. Since many of my participants labelled themselves as '*Gaokao* failures' and some are not willing to accept their *Gaokao* result, they needed opportunities to show a successful self to others, to regain a sense of self-confidence and self-value. At this moment, TU established an image that it will provide possibilities for its students, and

inspired these students to form an ideal goal – to become an excellent TUer, like those excellent senior TU students. Drawing on Archer's typology of reflexivity (2003, 2007a), meta-reflexivity worked on them, because this mode of reflexivity leads individuals to their ideals. In my research, at this phase when my students first came to TU, they practiced meta-reflexivity to set themselves this ideal. Meta-reflexivity, then, kept guiding them to continuously seek for useful information and advice, not only for a quick and smooth adjustment to TU, but also for their ideal and its achievement.

Autonomous reflexivity also played out its, perhaps not dominant, effect when they first came to TU, because my Yr1 students declared they needed to choose which (sometimes inconsistent) advice shared by their brother/sister learners to heed and use. Certain accounts reveal they started to establish a more confident sense of self and awaken their autonomous reflexivity. For example, Tan (F, Yr1) mentioned that although several senior students suggested that she not pay full attention to a course called 'Chinese Culture' because it will not contribute to her final credits, she was critical of this suggestion and decided not to follow it because she was interested in learning from the course. Some senior participants also reported their practice of autonomous reflexivity when they were in Yr1; they needed to reflect on the information and advice they collected because they were sometimes puzzled with which advice they should follow or not. Retrospectively, Zheng (M, Yr3) noted he was advised to take part in a few internship programmes in Yr1, but he did not follow this advice because he thought he would rather spend his time on things he was really interested in.

Salient and frequent practice of autonomous reflexivity emerged in my senior participants' accounts. The effect of autonomous mode grew stronger than that of the communicative mode of reflexivity. Perhaps, it is attributable to the encouragement and expectations of TU; these students have become more independent and self-reliant. The absence in my research of a 'control' sample of students from another traditional Chinese

university means that I do not know whether every university will facilitate students' personal development in this way. I cannot draw this conclusion in this research because of the lack of comparative data from traditional Chinese universities. What my findings can present is that greater autonomous reflexivity came into effect in these senior students' decision-making and action-taking in relation to what life they would like to live at TU and who they would like to become. These senior students' accounts show they have learned to make much use of external resources to support their practice of autonomous reflexivity. In turn, autonomous reflexivity guides them not to blindly follow their brother/sister learners' examples.

It is worth noticing that my students' accounts reveal that the effect of meta-reflexivity does not vanish during their identity formation at TU; by contrast, it is significant in exploring their self. My students are not like several of Archer's subjects who were dominated by meta-reflexivity and ended up with inaction. Meta-reflexivity orients them on the path to achieving their ideal – to be excellent TUers – by reflecting on their other modes of reflexivity. For Archer, meta-reflexivity appears to involve personal independence from external structural influences (Archer, 2003[38]). Constant reflecting on their ideal goal at TU, however, may also limit my students within the pre-designated, internalised structural expectations in their role as TU students. They attempt to fulfill their personal goal or meet the external expectations required by this role.

[38] See pp. 255-259, Chapter 8 in Archer's book *Structure, agency and the internal conversation.*

Chapter VII. Conclusion

This thesis reports on an investigation of a group of Chinese undergraduate students' identity formation at a British university (TU) in China. This investigation intends to provide a better understanding of these students' identity formation from their own perspectives with little researcher intervention, and to expand and complement the research literature in student identity formation. Four aspects of these students' self-perceived identity are presented – their study, daily life, relationships with significant others (brother/sister learners, *tongxue* – schoolmates/classmates – parents and tutors) and their views of their university life; a second focus is how these students formed their identity. Giddens's autobiography of identity and Archer's typology of reflexivity are used as two major thinking tools and analytical devices in this research. These accounts and analysis address the two research questions posed initially:

1) What do these Chinese undergraduate students perceive their identities in this university (TU) to be?
2) How do they form their identity at TU?

This conclusion chapter falls into three parts – 7.1 summary of the outcomes of this research; 7.2 contributions of this research; and 7.3 limitations of this research.

7.1 Summary of the outcomes of this research

This research has not discussed 'types' of identity, such as personal, professional, or academic identity, as they have been widely investigated in much existing literature (e.g. Li, 2013; Osteen, 2013; Yuan et al., 2019). It aims rather to shed light on what happened to the identities of these students during a particular period in their life trajectory in TU. In this respect, identity in this research refers to its basic connotation – 'Who am

I?' –, while its formation is treated from the perspectives of 'the individual in society' and 'society in the individual', expressed in sociological terms as agency and structure.

My data have been presented in Chapter IV to VI. Specifically, Chapter IV, provides basic information of my students by describing their 'origins' – their experiences and dispositions before coming to TU – and briefly introducing their life at TU in their eyes. Chapter V presents my students' persecutions of who they think they are in TU and the formation of the 'self' while Chapter VI is the theoretical analysis of my students' identity formation in TU drawing on Archer's typology of reflexivity.

7.2 Contributions of this research

My research will make distinct substantive contributions to multiple research areas, such as the study of Chinese students, investigations of TNHE, and college students' identity formation research. Additionally, it promotes the feasibility of integrating two significant sociological concepts, habitus and reflexivity, as an effective way of addressing a classical sociological concern – the relationships between personal agency and social structure. In particular, my thesis applies Archer's hypothesis of the 'internal conversation' and modes of reflexivity to an empirical study and attempts to expand her typology of reflexivity as a useful and practical 'tool for thinking' in identity studies. Finally, my research makes my students' voices be heard and lets them speak out their opinions and expectations on this IBC. Their reflections could have significant implications for the development of TNHE in China.

7.2.1 Contributions to relevant research literature

Firstly, my study can serve as a reminder for researchers interested in studying the question 'who are Chinese students?', but who mainly focus on differentiating Chinese students and their learning habits from their Western

counterparts, that they may confine the research itself to looking for a stereotypical image of Chinese students rather than contributing to a more authentic understanding of them. Chinese students have been widely researched since the 1990s when China opened up to the rest of the world, but some researchers – both Chinese and Westerners – tend to emphasise researching their formal performances in the formal classroom, seeking an 'essence' of being a Chinese student, with the aim of improving their academic performance (e.g. Biggs, 1996; Gill, 2008; Turner & Acker, 2002; Zhao & Thomas, 2017). This is understandable because research on Chinese students probably started from and continues in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes, mainly aiming to improve approaches to teaching Chinese students and often drawing on an assumption that there are fundamental divergences between 'the Chinese way' of learning and 'the Western way' (e.g. Liu, 1984 cited in Salili, 1996, p.97; Jin & Cortazzi, 2011, 2017; Murphy, 1987; Raymond & Choon, 2017; Rodrigues, 2005). Whichever label of Chinese learners found in this approach (e.g. 'Confucius-heritage culture learners'), it is likely to result in reducing Chinese students to being merely culturally-determined learners while ignoring the fact that they are evolving individuals having to deal with changes in themselves and their social environments (see detailed discussion in section 2.2). The search for a single and stable 'essence' of all Chinese students may be futile.

Secondly, my study expands and extends research literature on transnational higher education (TNHE) at student level. Different from a study on college students' experiences and individual development in one IBC in South Korea (Kim, 2014; see also section 2.4, above), although sharing similar cultural roots with those Korea students, my students in TU have seldom encountered stigmatising labelling by their former classmates or others as those Korean counterparts did. Rather, they identify themselves as different and accept and even enjoy the distinction given by being at TU. Although Kong (F, alumna) mentioned she felt she and some of her classmates in TU were once treated hostilely in a student activity at a traditional Chinese university, she did not form any guilt over this

experience. By contrast, she even commented, in a critical tone, that some outsiders of TNHE lacked a correct understanding of others and themselves. Putting it succinctly, my study provides further understanding of the experiences of Chinese students in a Western IBC and their subjective sense of identity, from their own perspectives.

Thirdly, my research makes a small but significant contribution to the study of college student identity formation. My study shifts the identity research focus from examining fixed and possibly pre-designated individual development steps to treating identity as an on-going process. Different from much research drawing on the classical and widely employed identity modes/theories (e.g. Chickering's seven vectors in Carmel-Gilfilen & Portillo, 2012; Perry's scheme of intelligent development in Liversage et al., 2018), my study focuses on an evolving student development process. Rather than fitting my students into any pre-designated modes/theories, I let my students talk about who they think they are (or are becoming) from their own subjective understandings of their self-exploration and personal growth in TU.

Drawing on Archer's typology of reflexivity, the interplay of modes of reflexivity is the key in my research to examining this process of students' identity formation in the mediation between their agential powers and the structural forces they are involved in. My research does not intend to over-emphasise either of the dichotomous concepts as other research has done: for example, the over-emphasis on individual powers using the theory of self-authorship in Cen's (2017) study of Chinese college students experiences in Chinese universities, or on the role of structural powers in Li's (2013) work on international Chinese students' identity formation in an American university (see section 2.3). Rather, the integration of the agency/structure dichotomy is a more authentic way to study identity formation in this era of late modernity because it is closer to the reality of human existence as individual in society with its constant interplay between

agency and structure (Burke and Stets, 2009; Côté and Charles, 2002) (see section 2.1.3).

Additionally, my research is open to diverse possibilities in the actual emergence of my students' personal development. Without predicting my students' development processes in any pre-designated identity modes/theories, my research reveals an efficient negotiation between two seemingly contradictory identities – a British and a Chinese half in my students' identity formation processes. This finding differs from that in a recent study of Chinese students' identity in a single, elite Chinese university by Yuan et al. (2019). Unlike their findings (see section 2.3), however, my students' accounts demonstrate they had successfully handled these challenges they encountered using their personal agential powers. College students can be evolving agents and university can be a place providing them with space to grow (Marginson[39], 2014). The relationship between students' agency and the university structure in relation to their identity formation may not be as easy as which decides which. The university structure –either the one in Yuan et al.'s study or TU in my research – does not simply play a determinant role in student identity formation but leaves space for its students' personal agency.

7.2.2 Theoretical and methodological contribution

My research provides a theoretical approach to understanding students' experiences and their impacts, which draws on sociological attempts to understand the individual in society. Giddens's autobiography of identity, Bourdieu's habitus and Archer's typology of reflexivity are employed as a 'tool for thinking' to examine and analyse the sociology of identity development amongst my students, rather than adopting an Eriksonian (or similar), developmental psychology-based approach (see section 2.1.3).

[39] Marginson actually takes a normative position on this and states that universities *should* provide space for individual growth.

This approach is inspired by the assumption of a hybridity of habitus and reflexivity (Adams, 2006; Sweetman, 2003) and examines its operational feasibility.

My research also provides responses to some of Archer's 'to-be-answered' questions while expanding and challenging her typology:

> *Were these four modes [of reflexivity] mutually exclusive or overlapping?*
> *How stable or mutable were these modes of reflexivity over the life course?* (2007a, p.92)

My brief response is, yes, they can be overlapping and mutable over even quite short periods of the life course.

My students' interview accounts demonstrate there were interplays amongst these modes of reflexivity. For example, as I discussed earlier, many Yr1 participants mainly practiced communicative and autonomous modes of reflexivity to guide their transition and adaptation to TU, in particular when they first came, when reliance on 'others' was essential for orientation. The senior participants' accounts showed that as they were involved in and knew more about the TU context, their autonomous reflexivity gradually became the more dominant mode, while communicative reflexivity played more of a supportive role in their decision-making and action-taking in their life trajectories at TU. In the interaction amongst modes of reflexivity, meta-reflexivity came into effect by confirming my students' ideal at TU – to become 'excellent TUers' and orienting them to their ideal (see Chapter VI). My students practiced multiple modes of reflexivity depending on different contexts in which they were involved and different issues that they encountered. No mode of reflexivity vanished from their available repertoire, according to their accounts, not even fractured reflexivity. Different from Archer's subjects (2003, 2007a), however, my students did not report that fractured reflexivity ever dominated them. They experienced a fractured

period in transition to TU, but they 'pieced themselves together' somehow and succeeded in adapting to TU.

> *Were the differences in the modalities practiced causally related to subjects' social origins or to social outcomes? (Archer, 2007a, p.92)*

Yes, research subjects' social origins will affect differences in practicing modes of reflexivity.

My students' social origins, including their family backgrounds, previous educational experiences and parental occupations, described in Chapter IV, are significant in understanding and analysing their self-exploration and decision-making at TU. Although I have deliberately refrained from individual psychological analysis in this research, the information of their origins itself facilitates a better understanding of the differences in practice of modes of reflexivity. For example, a participant, Lan (M, Yr4) who described his family as a democratic one and in his accounts revealed that he started to have a sense of self and establish autonomous reflexivity at an early age, differed from many other participants from more conventional Chinese family backgrounds who tended to fully depend on their parents' support (see section 4.1.2). In this sense, Archer's modes of reflexivity can serve as an alternative approach to examining and explaining differences in individuals' decision-making, influence by their social and cultural backgrounds.

Additionally, my empirical study expands Archer's notion of a 'dominant mode of reflexivity' to the idea of dynamic and interplaying paradigms (see Chapter VII). Archer, having proposed 'internal conversation' as the realisation of reflexivity was initially concerned to explore the usefulness of this idea and then to propose a typology of modes of reflexivity. Having established this as a useful analytical tool, she deliberately left it to others – in her 'questions to-be-answered' - to further explore its potential. She points out the possibility of interaction amongst modes of reflexivity but

does not address it empirically in her own investigations (2003, 2007a). Furthermore, the 'concrete point of reference' she referred to in examining reflexivity – occupational concerns and types of social mobility – limits the possible or likely outcomes of her research. She seems to identify one dominant mode of reflexivity in each case to explain each of her subjects' specific decision. In my research, however, the process of identity formation is the 'concrete point of reference'. Since the process of how my students constructed their identity at TU will necessarily be an ongoing, dynamic phenomenon rather than a single 'event', it might be expected to involve similarly dynamic developments in the reflexivity that is in part the driver of identity development. This is what was found and it has necessitated rejection of Archer's model of individuals as particular reflexive 'types', except perhaps temporarily and in relation to particular events or stages in their life at TU. What I have proposed instead is a series of cycles of interplay between Archer's modes of reflexivity, with each cycle leading to different forms of action. This model needs further empirical testing and, hopefully, extension to different fields of human activity.

7.2.3 More views from students and practical implications for IBCs in China

One potential audience for my research is educational practitioners in IBCs in China. My findings remind them that actual impact on students' personal development in the IBC context is more complex than what might be anticipated. The following discussion draws on my research, carried out in a single IBC in China. The transferability to other IBCs of findings and conclusions in this research cannot be assumed and the possibility of such transfer must be subject to empirical research in each IBC context. Some findings and implications, however, derive from the very nature of an IBC as a 'non-local' institution - culturally distinct from local institutions - and greater confidence in their applicability to other IBCs might be justified.

IBCs are likely to publicise their cultural distinctions in either academic or non-academic domains to their new students, if only as a marketing device.

As part of this marketing, examples of 'successful' students are a feature of many IBC websites (e.g. Liverpool/Xi'an *Jiaotong* University [XJTLU]). In doing this, these IBCs are - consciously or not – providing student role models, similar to the 'brother/sister learners' in my students' accounts, in order to facilitate new students' adaptation to the context of the IBC rapidly and smoothly. (These examples of 'successful students' may also serve the purpose identified in my research of restoring confidence to students who had aspired to remain in the national system and see the IBC as an inferior alternative.)

According to my students' accounts, they did admire those successful brother/sister learners introduced by TU, especially those who had been admitted into top overseas universities. Yue (M, Yr1) described these excellent brother/sister learners as 'the ceilings of TU students' academic achievements'. Yr1 students in particular, to their own surprise and even joy, found a 'good' student model to follow and also to wish to become, when they first came to TU. This desire to be seen as a 'good' student exemplifies Chinese popular cultural influence on them and provides a rationale for IBCs to introduce the role models to the new students.

At the same time, IBCs also claim to characterise 'freedom' as one cultural distinction of Western education (see TU or XJTLU website). These experiences of freedom are widely reported in my research, such as the absence of curfew rules in their dorms, no compulsory self-study sessions to attend and being able to 'hang out' late at night, but should be problematized as a cultural disruption in students' transition to TU. For some at least, it is too sudden an exposure to so much freedom; such a 'free' student life is different from their previous dispositions in learning and living and beyond their expectation as a Chinese student. After a short 'honeymoon' period in TU, some students found themselves lost for direction and felt a lack of a sense of belonging in that they were used to belonging to - 班 (*ban*), a particular classroom assigned to a group of students as their

‘base’ and community in a school/university. In their *ban*, students can obtain regular academic and non-academic support from their classmates and a resident tutor (班导师 *ban daoshi*), and it provides an initial source of companionship and identity that persists throughout their time in the institution.

> Although I prefer a freestyle of teaching method in our university, I cannot stop envying my former classmates who can belong to a ban and can make close friends with their *tongxue* (classmates). (He, F, Yr1)

Such a cultural disruption in students’ transition to TU, however, tends to be treated lightly, as something that will resolve itself with time and further experience of life at TU. The transition to an IBC is not achieved through a clear cultural ‘break’ with the past, nor should it be, as this would implicate the IBC in a form of cultural imperialism. Students need to possess a sound cultural foundation for them to deal with the ‘shock’ of entering an IBC.

In this respect, just throwing the students into the ‘freedom’ of an IBC and totally relying on them to go through the transition to an IBC themselves is a kind of ‘shock therapy’ and not all students reacted to this effectively. I do not reject the IBCs’ intention to provide the students with personal space and allow them to invoke their agential power and independence to sort out problems on their own, but IBCs should know the students’ personal realities (as I have attempted to reveal for a sample of students in this research) before auditing effective agendas and planning support for the new students in particular.

On the other hand, the presentation of ‘good’ student role models is welcomed – at least initially – by the students but it can be seen as a contradiction to the notion of individual freedom of choice. Many senior students in my research realised they could not become ‘others’ and would not, because these role models were not what they would like to become of

their own will. Interestingly, students' own will as to whom they would like to become was guided by their agential capacity which as they reported was invoked and formed in the context of the IBC. This development of personal agency is the positive side of the college experiences of students in this IBC. My findings show that having experienced the phase in their early days in TU where they were mostly guided by communicative reflexivity, the students did develop autonomous reflexive capacity and a desire to take charge of what happens to them over their life in the university. Because of the complexity of the interaction between agency and structure over their life in TU, it is hard to say whether the acquisition of greater autonomy is attributable to the 'shock therapy' designed – consciously or not - by TU, or just due to the exposure to the context of the IBC; or whether it is only a necessity for their survival in the IBC. In this respect, Archer's typology does help in understanding college students' identity formation, but it appears to be 'incomplete'. More studies in different educational contexts are necessary in order to subject Archer's typology to wider and more diverse empirical testing.

Additionally, tutors and staff of IBCs should be aware of the diverse students' motivations for coming to an IBC and their curriculum designs may not match students' academic expectations. According to many of my students, this IBC was seen as their fallback option in the choice after *Gaokao,* and those coming to IBCs are labelled as 'not good students from rich families'. Many of my students admitted that they considered this to be a source of personal shame, even self-labelling as '*Gaokao* failures'. This is why a few students in my research with relatively higher *Gaokao* scores than other TU students mentioned without my asking that their *Gaokao* result was not 'poor' but could let them go to a 985 Chinese university. In this respect, these students were eager to show their peers in other Chinese universities how they and their prospects changed in TU: they expected to gain high academic achievements. That is why a number of Yr1 students in particular expressed their disappointment with the teaching delivered in their preliminary sessions. Comparing their experiences with their former

classmates, they thought they what they were learning in Yr1 was easier and simpler. Sun (F, Yr1), a student in the Science and Engineering Department, expected a 'brainstorm' in each class as she had experienced in her high school and a 'busy' life at TU; she claimed she could not sense many academic challenges. Wang (M, Yr1) thought TU had underestimated Chinese students' academic adaptability. He believed 'one week' was enough for them to get academically adapted to university, because they had just gone through the intensive training for *Gaokao*, but they were given a whole year in TU (Yr1).

Practitioners and planners in this IBC believe their pedagogy encourages real student-tutor communication and they do create various channels - such as student satisfaction questionnaires and a tutorial programme - to collect students' views on their learning and living and to provide support to students. But many of the students in my study still feel they lack equal and efficient communication with tutors.

On the one hand, it seems that the norm of teachers as authority figures in their previous educational experiences retains its impact on the students. Junior students reported they dared not and even still dare not talk to their tutors. Shan (F, Yr1) said, 'we dare not express our thoughts to tutors.' Yang admitted that even when students disagreed with their tutor's statements, many chose not to argue with the tutor.

> Once our tutor played a video clip in the classroom to show cultural differences between China and the West. The video displayed Chinese children being very noisy when eating in the restaurant while their Western counterparts were not. But I disagree. I think it is stereotypical. I have noticed '*waiguo*' (non-Chinese) children in our canteens can also be noisy. … I think my classmates also held a similar view with me. But in the end, no one dare put a hand up to argue with the tutor. (Yang, F, Yr1)

On the other hand, real communication might be being discouraged by some staff members' notions of academic or even cultural superiority. Kong (F, the alumna) said she and her classmates had argued with one of their tutors about his/her misunderstanding of Chinese culture and Chinese people, but that tutor refused to communicate with them because the tutor saw him/herself as the expert in this area.

> We used to keep explaining to the tutor that we [Chinese people] are not like those in his/her imagination. We are evolving. But when we realised this tutor would never change his/her opinion, we gave up arguing with him/her, because it was pointless. Also, the tutor is an expert in Chinese study. He/she was unhappy when we pointed out his/her misunderstanding. (Kong, F, alumna)

As to the existing communication channels, some senior students claimed these are not efficient approaches to letting their voices be heard. They even gradually became indifferent to responding to the questionnaires sent by the university. Guan (M, Yr3) observed senior students did not take the teaching assessment questionnaire seriously because 'it is useless and we will not meet this tutor again in the next semester; then, few of us will bother to recall this tutor's bad performances in teaching and comment on the tutor.' He added that 'but if our tutor is excellent, I will well praise the tutor in the questionnaire.' Yue feels the university does not care about their opinions, however.

> I carefully completed every questionnaire required by our university and reported my comments and suggestions every year. But up to now [Yue was in Yr3 when we had this conversation], I have not received any feedback from them. (Yue, M, Yr1)

This practice to display concern from the university seems to gradually become merely a bureaucratic procedure to students, as Guan (M, Yr3) claimed he and his classmates never took it seriously.

Effective communication with students based on mutual respect should be established for sufficient understanding of students from their own perspectives. A prerequisite for establishing such a communication ideal must be to avoid authoritarian positioning of the IBC staff as the unchallengeable 'experienced and experts'. Rather, listening to what is happening to the students as an older adult, with empathy, is the first step to encouraging students willingness to communicate.

7.3 Limitations of this research

Firstly, this research is based on cross-sectional data collected from one IBC in China. Ideally, a four-year longitudinal study should be conducted in order to investigate how these students develop their identity during their entire university life trajectory. Under the constraints of time, however, this research can only focus on four groups of students from four years of study at TU examined cross-sectionally. Although Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) emphasise that there is seldom deviation between the results of a cross-sectional and a longitudinal study on college student development, every student's personal development is different and impossible to be fully represented by those of others.

The researcher's subjectivity causes a second limitation of this research. Although this research intends to respect these students' utterances and let them speak for themselves, the analysis and presentation of research findings must go through the researcher. In this respect, the researcher's subjectivity is of significance to the research. The researcher's knowledge, cognition, the habits of thinking and interpretation, values and even emotion and relationships with the research subjects impact on the entire research from the research design to analysis. The themes reported in the research are mainly based on the researcher's interpretations of the research subjects' accounts and the theoretical framework the researcher employs. Given this limitation, future research with investigator triangulation (Cohen

et al., 2017) may reduce this limitation that is perhaps inherent to a qualitative study.

The third limitation comes from the relatively small sample size of this research. This research only focuses on 45 Chinese undergraduate students at TU. This is rather a small group of the total population of Chinese students (over 8,000 students in 2020) of TU. Although this research does not aim to provide a generalised result of Chinese undergraduates' identity formation at TU, the more students who are recruited in the research, the more and more diverse voices and views will be heard by the educational practitioners in the university and even outsiders of TNHE in China, and the better intercommunication between the educational practitioners and students will be established.

Nevertheless, because I did not need to hurry to deal with a larger sample within the required time, I was able to talk to each of my 45 participants with great patience and empathy, which made them see me as a trustworthy 'big sister' and assisted me in getting their honest, personal comments on their lives at TU. The small sample does not reduce the value of my research, but did enable me to acquire in-depth data; these data balanced against the limitation of a small sample. If focusing on a large sample, for example, using questionnaires, I would be unlikely to get the details and genuinely felt views from these students.

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Appendix I – Key concepts in the history of Chinese modern education

Learning from the West in New Culture Movement

According to an authoritative history book of Chinese education *General History of Chinese Education* edited by a senior professor *Wang Bingzhao* (1934-2009) of Peking University, Chinese modern education originates from the Opium War (1840) (Wang et al., 2013). The external aggression forced Manchu Dynasty to open their door to doing commerce with other countries, and also brought exotic modern cultures to China and provoked Chinese learners to rethink the role Confucian education. Soon afterward, the renowned New Culture Movement (1915-1921) occurred under this circumstance of both the external aggression from other countries and the domestic anti-tradition over China. New Culture Movement is defined as the national saving movement because it initially aimed for China's national independence (Chen, 2017). It is also depicted as the watershed in Chinese cultures because it cut off the mental impacts of chains of feudal relationships such as *wulun* on Chinese people (Huang, 2019; Liu, 2019; Liu, 2019). Famous thinkers at that era such as *Hu Shih* (1891-1962) and *Yan Fu* (1854-1921) initiated the discussion of ways to save China and suggested learning from the West. They translated Western classic works[40] and advocated Western scientific methods, which exerted pervasive influence on Chinese learners at that era. In aggerate, the core of New Culture Movement was to facilitate full westernisation in China. However, some thinkers, such as Liang Shuming (1893-1988) rejected this strategy. Instead, he was devoted to reforming Confucianism and establishing New Confucianism[41] (Chen, 2017; Jiao & Wang, 2019; Major, 2017), and also grounded modern Chinese education on New Confucianism.

[40] For example, Yan Fu is the first person in China who translated Western work speicalised education' s. He translated *Evolution and Ethics* by Thomas Henry Huxley and many English words and expressions, such as freedom(自由), society (社会) and evolution (进化) (Shen, 2019).

[41] New Confucianism (*xin rujia*) is an intellectual movement of Confucianism that began in the early 20th century in Republican China, and further developed in post- Mao era contemporary China (Wikipedia, Baidu: New Confucianism, 新儒家).

On the roots of modern Chinese education, Chinese scholars fall into two camps. Some scholars (e.g. Bu et al, 2016; Zhao, 2016) think Confucian traditions continue the positive influence on Chinese modern education in terms of moral education in particular. While more (He & Tian, 2015; Lin, 2006; Wang, 2014; Wu & Yu, 2011) seem to claim that modern Chinese education has been deeply influenced by the Western cultures after the New Culture Movement. For example, Lin (2006) asserts that traditional Chinese cultures and values gradually faded in modern Chinese education during the twentieth century. The styles of buildings of schools, the teaching systems, the management and teacher training patterns in schools all MIMIC a Western educational system (*ibid*). In order to discard the influence of 'old' values such as '*dushu* (读书, education) is superior to all walks[42]', the government promulgated regulations to force most graduates to work with peasants in the countryside in 1954 (Wang, 2014).

Marxist ideology and John Dewey's educational principles

Wu & Yu (2011) state that modern Chinese education, after the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, entered a new era. From 1949 to the 1990s, Chinese modern education was set up in Marxist ideology (Wang et al., 2013). For example, a former Soviet Union educator Ivan Kairov's 'speicalised education' pedagogy was dominant at that period in China education (He & Tian, 2015; Wu & Yu, 2011). He and Tian (2015) point to a fact that Kairov's pedagogy could influence Chinese modern education for nearly half a century partially because of a crucially political factor. Following the educational pattern of the former Soviet seems to have been the best option for China at that time (Cold War [1947-1991]) (Wu & Yu 2011). However, Wu and Yu (2011) indicate that 'specialised education' pedagogy has also exerted a long-term negative impact on modern Chinese education. They illustrate that Kairov's pedagogy ignores developing students' personality and further criticise that led by 'specialised education',

[42] 万般皆下品 惟有读书高 – 出自 北宋 汪洙 《神童诗》(Wang Zhu [birth and death years unknown], North Song Dynasty [960-1127], *The Poem of Wonder Child*) (Luo, 1985).

China has successfully trained many 'specialised talents' for serving for the society, but these talents seem to become 'machines' without their own personalities (Wu & Yu, 2011, p.156). Another long impact produced by following teaching techniques of former Soviet Union seems to be imposed on students' formal performance in the classroom. Lewis et al. (2008) find that Chinese students are more used to straight classroom discipline compared with Australian and Israeli students. They do not mind witnessing corporal punishment conducted by teachers for their misbehavior (*ibid*). Hung maintain that the Communist pedagogy tends to impose certain values on students, such as 'the nobility of labor, the sacrifice of soldiers, the grandeur of Tiananmen Square' (2014, p. 841). These values are taught as modern virtues from kindergarten to tertiary education (Gu, 2019; Xing & Yan, 2018; Zhang, 2018) and influence generations of Chinese students, those in the 1990s in particular.

Since 1979, the economic reform initiated in the first time in China, Chinese society has kept changing, as well as the goals and systems in education (He & Tian, 2015). Whatever they are changing into, however, students have kept being expected to be fostered as the socialist constructors and successors of China (Wang, 2014). The same year, PRC and the USA officially established their diplomatic relations. Then American educational models and philosophies, such as those of John Dewey's organisational principles, started to gain traction with modern Chinese education. The interest in and influence of Dewey's educational ideas correspond to a time, the 21st century, an emphasis of freedom in students' personality development emerged (He & Tian, 2015). It is difficult to assign the degree of influence caused by Dewey's ideas, but changes in Chinese modern education and students' formal performance in the classroom have been noticed.

Krajewsk (2006), an experienced professor with expertise in educational studies provides some evidence of these nuances from his experiences. He was invited to China to train Chinese elementary and middle school

principals in Guangxi province, an ethnic minority autonomous region, boarder Vietnam. Krajewsk has witnessed changes in teaching and learning in modern Chinese education between 1985 to 2006. He expresses confidence in Chinese education by writing Although the list of entrenched and system-wide challenges seems overwhelming, most Chinese principals feel they now have the skills and educational foundations to overcome them.' (2006, p. 65). In his observation, although education in poor regions and rural areas seldom changed, teaching in Chinese urban cities has become actively-based more 'modern' according to American teaching standard (2006). Textbooks have been up-dated, critical thinking skills have been taught and practiced, and task-based pedagogy such as group activities in the classroom has been employed and encouraged rather than employing fully teacher-lecturing approach (*ibid*). Although there is not detailed description of how they acted in classroom in Krajewsk's paper (2006), as he states, seemingly these Chinese students have been being 'remoulded' as what American students are expected to perform in the classroom. No wonder some researchers (e.g. Han, 2018; He & Tian, 2015; Li, 2006; Wang, 2014; Wu & Yu, 2011) assert, Chinese modern education seems to be impacted by Western pedagogy.

Appendix II – Interview Guideline

I. introduction about myself and my study

II. demographic information (a short questionnaire)

III. Interview

1. Why did you choose this university and this major?

2. What was your expectation of this university when you first came here?

3. What is your learning approach? Is there any difference from your prior learning approach?

4. Have you encountered any challenges in learning and living? How do you solve them, if so?

5. How do you spend your leisure time? (hobbies? student society? Volunteer programme? Shua ye? Internship programme?)

6. How do you get along with your *tongxue* and tutors? Have you made any friends in univeristy? Are they different from your former *tongxue*? Are tutors at TU different from your teachers in high school? How?

7. Do you often contact your parents? What do you often talk about?

8. What is the best/worst part in your university life? Why?

9. Do you have any future plan?

Appendix III – A short questionnaire

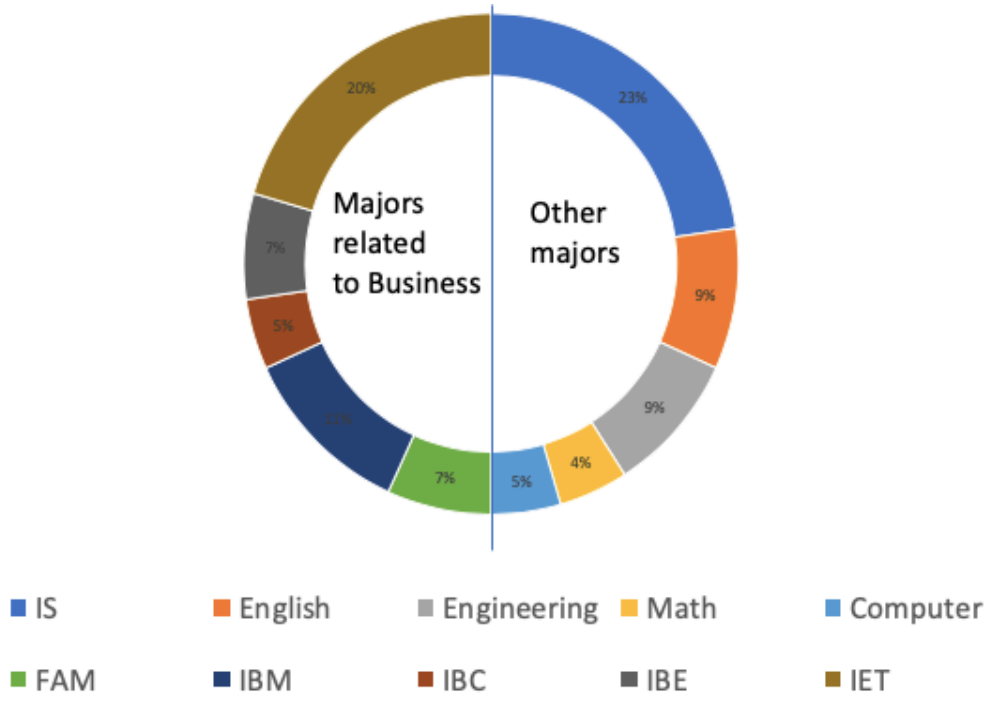
Demographic information	
year of study _____	major _____
Hometown _____	only child Y___ N___
hobbies _____	
Occupation of your father_____ /mother_____	
Highest educational qualification of your father _____ mother ___	

中文填写即可

Appendix IV — My participants' major distribution

Faculties	Majors	Participants				
FoB	IBC	Yue		Bai		M
		Yr1		Yr4		
	IBM	Shan, He	Peng, Song		Shen	F
		Yr1	Yr3		Yr4	
	IBE	Tan				F
			Zheng, Guan		Wei	M
		Yr1	Yr3		Yr4	
	FAM	Ning, Zhang, Fang				F
		Yr1				
FHSS	IET	Ning	Nan, Ren	Lu	Jia, Feng	F
			Cai	Chu		M
		Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	
	English	Shi	Yuan		Jiang	F
			Ma			M
		Yr1	Yr3		Yr4	
	IS	Yang	Lv		Zhou	F
		Xu, Chen	Yi, Xing		Lan, Ou	M
		Yr1	Yr2		Yr4	
FoSE	Architecture	Wang				M
		Yr1				
	Maths	Guo, Pan				M
		Yr1				
	Engineering	Sun, Shu				F
		Zhu				M
		Yr1				
	Geography	Hua				M
		Yr2				
	Computer	Zhao		Rong		M
		Yr2		Yr3		

Major abbreviations: I- International; B-Business; E-economics; C-communication; M-management; F-finance;
A-accounting; T-trade; S-studies.


Majors related to Business
Other majors
20%
23%
7%
9%
5%
9%
11%
4%
7%
5%
IS
English
Engineering
Math
Computer
FAM
IBM
IBC
IBE
IET

Appendix V – One sample of interview transcription and translation

Participant's pseudonym: XING, male, year 2, majoring in IS,
from Jiangxi Province
Interviewer: F
This was a Wechat interview.

F: Do you still remember why you came to study here?

Xing: Three reasons. First and the most important reason is that I like the atmosphere and freedom here and I think a genuine university should be like this. …when I was in high school, teachers always told me to stop questioning and just followed the textbooks; when I came here, I felt "wow, I am finally free! No one will ever manipulate me." Secondly, I planed to study abroad. (F: Where did you want to go?) UK or France. (F: why?) They are two most greatest ethnicities in the world. I am crazy about their histories, politics and ideologies…cultures and fine arts. (F: How did you know about the two countries?) From books and documentaries. At first, I didn't like UK because I thought English people were picky but when I went to UK I totally changed my thoughts of it and loved this country. …When I was at high school, I liked US but when I went to US I found it is a country without history and culture. But France and UK are great and highly civilized countries. This November, we went to UK to attend the Mock United Union Meeting and came across their Memorial Day. I felt British were great because they voluntarily attended the memorial but in a similar vein, in China we are all pushed to attend these kind of memorial compulsorily. …(F: Do you know Lei Feng Day?) Yes. But I don't believe in it. …According to my experiences, people I met in London are all more friendly than people I met in China..

F: What did you think of this university before you came here?

XING: It should be compatible and value-free ..It is not fully like what I expected. It gives students a lot of freemom and opens our eyes and 'it treats students as human beings'. Especially in IS, I bet in other state-

universities they cannot express as freely as us'. On the other hand, too much freedom brings about trouble in our life. It is not right to judge others' life but UNNC life style is crazy and boastful though it seems colorful. … Students should have focused more on their academic activities, learning knowledge or attending lectures or seminars; they instead focus on attending a variety of students clubs, activities, internships etc. (F: I heard that some student activities/clubs are compulsory.) Yes, so we were pushed to attend those sucked (shui) activities and I felt I had wasted a lot of time last year. I went to Peking University last summer. I admired their academic atmosphere. … but the academic atmosphere here is free but not professional. I know it is unfair to compare this university to Peking university. But I think most students here think they are hard working but what they do is play with cell phones, take some selfies and post some tweets and pretend they are studying.

F: I think you mentioned the university respected students. Why did you also feel you were forced to do things?

XING: Yes. Interestingly, there are freedom and compulsoriness. …I think it is biased because some rules are only to mainland Chinese students; for example, we have to attend psychical education classes and some compulsory students activities.

F: What do you think you have attained last year?

XING: At the end of year 1, I figured out what I didn't like… I didn't like boastfulness. I have made some friends. (F: Where do you think this boastful fashion came?) From the larger environment outside this campus and also to some extent, I think this university's advocacy is inextricable. …UNUK is a Top 100 university but not UNNC…the university tries very hard to leave a perfect impression on the public by showing them our colorful life, diverse student activities and telling the outsiders our students are the best…and the senior students often share their experiences with the new comers that how wonderful their lives will be and how good this university is and how amazing the opportunities they are going to have, in particular, during the induction week…the whole thing is like a marketing strategy… (F: em, I feel the confident atmosphere in here.) But it is over

confident. Everyone here believes they are academically indulged, but what do they actually do? What do they actually do every night? They believe they stay up late for academic study…I don't believe. ..With regard to lectures, the classroom is always full of students with absent minds. (F: Do you mean lecture like the 'Chinese cultures'?) Yes.

F: What 's your opinion about this course?

XING: I absolutely believe we should have it, which is the reason why we call ourselves the Chinese-British cooperated university; we should learn Chinese cultures because we are Chinese; that is part of the humanistic education which we lack. But unfortunately, students dislike it.

F: What is your purpose of engaging in HE?

XING: To know the world and to know myself. To learn knowledge and to make some change.

F: Then have you thought about your future career?

Xing: When I was at high school, I wished I could work in the UN to change the world; but now I hope I can work in academic arenas; I focus on my study right now and put the other things aside. (F: Will you plan to do a PhD?) Yes, but I will not choose IS, maybe anthropography, sociology, history or Western philosophy. (F: Why not IS?) It is a new field compared to other subjects I mentioned and I think there is no worth learning it to a doctoral level. (F: But why did you choose it in the first place?) I am interested in politics and this is the only related one I can choose. (F: Did your parents recommend this too?) No, they recommended me to study finance, but they are open-minded. Oh, I forgot to tell you that I am now in my gap year. I want to have a rest. (F: Okay. Then what are you doing now?) I am living a retirement life, reading, watching movies and writing novels. (F: Do you miss your school days?) Not at all. (F: But you have to come back..) Yes, when I am ready physically and mentally. (F: Have you contacted your classmates to ask about their life in UNNC?) No, no need to contact them if I want to know what has happened, I will look through their Wechat Moments, then I will know everything. (F: Do you often look through others' Moments?) No, but I post a lot of mine. (F: Yeah, I see many pictures of concerts and fine arts in your Moments. Are you good at playing

instruments and painting?) I learned but I think I am more interested in enjoying myself by listening or watching them. (F: You have seen the Loving Vincent twice?) Yes. The first time I seen it with a girl whom I had/have(?) a secret crush on in London. It was a long story. I saw it again in Shenzhen by myself. Different feelings.

F: Could I ask what kind of romantic relationship you would like to build on?

XING: Platonic love. (F: Okay. There is no such limitations of banning dating in colleges …..but I think students are still not allowed to date in high school, right?) In principle, no; but in practice, many students have girl or boy friends in high school. (F: Okay. What was your high school life like?) Full of pressure, good pressure and some funny things occasionally happened. (F: What were the funny things could you share with me?)

Like reading, playing basketball, chatting with friends and teachers sometimes. (F: Do you often contact your high school classmates?) Only during summer or winter vocations, but only with no more than 10 friends.

…

F：Do you usually watch the 7 o'clock news or BBC news or others?

XING: I used to watch news in high school. But not now. (F: But how do you know what happened to the world ?) If I need to know something I will watch, but I willn't spend time on the current affairs. News reports are subjective. I don't want to be deeply influenced by others commentaries or opinions. For me and other IS students, I think we should master knowledge related to our major and then do our own analysis.

F: Have you seen the movie Wolf Warriors?

XING: Yes. I am crazy about movies of military genre. Wolf Warrior I was good but II was just so so. (F：But it was a great hit and many audience said it made them more proud of China and love our country more. How will you respond if you were asked whether you felt the same?) Too much national pride will lead to arrogance. As to patriotism, I don't know what did you mean and why it is related to you…(F: Sorry, if you feel uncomfortable with this question, let's just forget it. Are you living with your parents now?) Yes but I usually live on my own because they are usually away. (F: Are you

used to this?) Yes, when I was young, I usually lived on my own because of my parents' career. Now I cook for lunch and my mum cooks for dinner.

F: If you confronted any challenges would you turn to your parents?

XING: What did you mean? Challenges? (F: For example, you broke something and you didn't know how to deal with it.) Why bothered my parents? I will search solutions from Baidu (Chinese Wikipedia). (F: Okay. Did you usually call your parents when you were at campus?) No, they called me twice a week. (F: What did you talk about?) Small talks.

Appendix VI – 'The TV drama' story

An issue about TU's name and public image drew TUers' much attention. One main character in a TV drama's lines – 'TU students are not working hard. Passing exams and gaining the diploma of TU are very easy.' – irritated TU students. The following picture is the screenshot of the university's response to this issue. Information which may uncover the university has been deleted or replaced.

Dear all

Many of you will have already seen **The University** name appear on the Chinese language TV drama **X** , which was broadcast on the **X** TV channel on Wednesday 1st November.

Just to set the record straight, whilst the **X** TV crew was given permission to film on the campus they never raised possibility of using the University's name in any form in the show. We are also shocked to hear the misleading and inaccurate dialogue between two characters that referred directly to **the University** . Also by the obvious manipulation of an image of a different university purporting to be the main gate of **TU**.

We just wanted to let you know that the University is formulating a suitable response to what we deem deliberate mis-representation and breach of trust. Actions include:

- Seeking external legal advice
- Contacting the show's producers to protest about the misuse of the University's name and the misleading and inaccurate script/dialogue/imagery and seeking a public retraction.
- We will be posting a statement on **TU** Chinese social media to reassert the facts about teaching and learning on each of the **TU** Campuses.

We are making every effort to safeguard the University reputations and will keep you updated on the progress. We shall also be reviewing the contractual arrangements for any such future access to **TU's** campus by external media.

Best Regards
The Provost

My participants expressed their opinion on this issue. Among them, Yr1 participants were particularly angry about this misunderstanding of TU and its students. For example,

> We are not like the characters in the TV drama. TU's diploma is not easy to gain as they said in the drama. (Guo, M, Yr1)

> TU is not a place where you can 'buy' a diploma! TUers are working hard! (Shan, F, Yr1)

I cannot stop them talking like this. I will not let these misleading words bother me because they do not understand us at all. (Ning, F, Yr1)