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A qualitative exploration of how host Chinese staff make sense of their intercultural experiences in a Sino-foreign cooperative university

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Abstract

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This study is concerned with how host Chinese staff (HCS) make sense of their intercultural experiences in a Sino-foreign cooperative university from a sensemaking perspective. Specifically, the study qualitatively explores HCS's perceptions of and their responses to cultural differences.

The empirical findings show that: 1) HCS construct cultural differences from three perspectives: personality traits, communication styles, and cultural values. 2) HCS's responses to cultural differences are identified as three types: fight-flight, acceptance, and intercultural sensemaking which encompasses three concurrent processes: learning, identity construction, and relationship building. In addition, the findings also show the hindrances of intercultural sensemaking from the perspective of HCS: lack of language proficiency, lower self-esteem, lack of similarity, lack of availability, and perceived communication difficulties. 3) HCS's engagement in intercultural sensemaking can lead to the development of intercultural competence in terms of awareness of the self and the other, communicating across culture, acquiring cultural knowledge, intercultural responsibility building, and positive attitudes.

A model of HCS's intercultural interaction is developed based on the empirical findings. It provides a holistic overview of HCS's intercultural interaction, and highlights the dynamic nature of sensemaking.

The findings give valuable insights and have practical implications for multicultural organisations and individuals working or interested in working in multicultural organisations, especially in the context of China.

A qualitative exploration of how host Chinese staff make sense of their intercultural experiences in a Sino-foreign cooperative university

By

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In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctorate in Education

School of Education

June 2014

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abbreviations

HCS	The host Chinese staff
UNNC	The University of Nottingham Ningbo, China
ZWEG	Zhejiang Wanli Education Group, China
UoN	The University of Nottingham, UK
MOE	The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China
WTO	The World Trade Organisation
HCNs	Host country nationals
LCC	Low-context communication
HCC	High-context communication
FFM	The Five Factor Model
O factor	Open to experience factor
CIT	The critical incident technique

Declaration

This EdD thesis is my own work and no part of the material offered in it has previously been submitted for a degree in this or in any other university.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

Acknowledgement

My greatest thanks go to my superiors at Zhejiang Wanli Education Group, China, particularly Madam Xu Yafen and Mr. Ying Xiong. Without their spiritual and financial support, I would not have been able to come to the UK for the study.

My great thanks go to my supervisor, Dr. Prue Holmes, for her encouraging and inspiring supervision. I am deeply touched by her great patience, invaluable advice and encouragement, and her confidence in me throughout the journey. Sincere thanks should also be given to my other supervisor, Professor Carl Bagley, for providing much insightful advice on finalising the whole thesis.

I would like to express my deep appreciation for the support of the staff at UNNC who voluntarily involved themselves in this thesis. In particular, I want to thank Mr. Weiqi Shen, Xiaodong Chen, and Wen Li, who made my fieldwork at UNNC so smooth and efficient.

I would also like to thank my friends, who provided me with love, encouragement and support. In particular, I want to thank Mr. Frank Sowerby, who taught me not only English but British culture. I want to thank Mr. David Barnes for his friendship and for proofreading the whole thesis.

Finally, I want to thank my family for their unconditional and consistent love and support. Without their support, I could not focus on my work during such a long sojourn in the UK.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This study is a qualitative exploration of how host Chinese staff (HCS) make sense of their experiences of intercultural communication with their expatriate counterparts in a Sino-foreign cooperative university. The focus of the study is on their perceptions of and responses to cultural differences. To understand their intercultural communicative behaviour in their intercultural encounters, I draw on perspectives from intercultural communication, psychology, and organisational management. Through this investigation, I aim to provide insights into intercultural communication in complex multicultural organisations, especially in the context of China.

In this opening chapter, I offer basic information on the thesis. Specifically, the first section presents the development of the research topic by articulating the context, both practical and theoretical, and the rationale and aims of the research. Section 1.2 clarifies the main terms related to this study. In section 1.3, I outline the structure of the thesis.

1.1 The context and development of the research topic

This section addresses the context and the formulation of the research topic in combination with my own experiences. I first introduce the contextual information relevant to this study, such as the status quo of the internationalization of Chinese higher education and the research setting. Subsequently, I elaborate on the formulation and development of the research topic, and present the purpose of the research.

My interest in researching intercultural communication derived from my work experience. In 2005, I was appointed to participate in the establishment of the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China (UNNC). It was the first Sino-foreign cooperative university, co-established by Zhejiang Wanli Education Group, China (ZWEG) and the University of Nottingham, UK (UoN). It was conceived as an English-medium university at the outset of cooperation. The UNNC students

would be awarded degrees by UoN, which means they would receive the same degree certificates as their counterparts at UoN. The British partner is in charge of education while the Chinese partner is responsible for logistical services and the construction of infrastructure facilities.

My role there, as a representative of the Chinese partner, was to be in charge of logistical services, such as student and staff accommodation, the canteen, and infrastructure maintenance for UNNC, and the management of student affairs in living areas. In order to meet the needs of UNNC, I had to communicate with the representatives of the British partner from time to time. I always struggled to understand accurately and respond properly to my colleagues from different cultural backgrounds, although at that time I had more than ten years' managerial experience in several domestic organisations in China. I felt confident as an administrator in these Chinese organisations but lacked confidence in such a multicultural organisation. Some communicative principles taken for granted from a Chinese perspective did not work in contact with people from other cultures. I was frequently frustrated by my expatriate colleagues' misunderstandings of my efforts. It was the first time that I realized that the ways in which people from different cultures behaved were different from my own, and perhaps those of the Chinese, and intercultural communication was much more difficult than intracultural communication in the workplace.

In effect, what puzzled me also puzzled the top leaders of UNNC's Chinese partner at that time. They realized that it was essential to improve the managers' capabilities in intercultural communication, especially in a multicultural organisation. Accordingly, they decided to support me to do research in the UK, partly due to my potential and capability in management and partly to promote the further development of the organisation. At the same time, the senior personnel of the British partner also reached a similar conclusion. For example, Professor Yang Fujia, then chancellor of UoN and president of UNNC, had this conversation in an interview with Mei Zhiqing, a reporter from South Daily Newspaper, China:

记者:您现在是欧洲一所著名大学的校长，作为一位东方人,您觉得东西方之间应该怎样才能建立一种畅通的对话?

杨福家: 这个要了解相互的文化。 比如讲我们宁波诺丁汉大学已经建立五年了，从开始筹备到后来的建设，其中最困难的就是沟通。……中国文化有它的优点，西方文化也有它的优点，要相互学习。学习的目的就是为了了解，很多的误解就是产生于不了解。(Mei, 2010, p. A09)

Mr Mei: What do you, as current chancellor of a famous university in Europe and an easterner, think about how to establish effective dialogue between the West and East?

Mr Yang: It is essential to establish a mutual understanding of respective cultures. For example, UNNC has been set up for more than five years, within which time, from starting preparatory work to further construction, the most difficult problem has been communication… Chinese culture has its strengths, and so does Western culture. We should learn from each other. The purpose of learning is to promote mutual understanding since many misunderstandings are caused by our failure to understand each other. (Mei, 2010, p. A09)

Mr Yang indicated that (intercultural) communication is the most difficult thing to achieve in the course of cooperation, and reciprocal learning is imperative since most misunderstanding derives from a breakdown of understanding.

Bearing in mind my quandary at work and my commitment, I re-started my study career at Durham University in 2009. During the first year, I read copious literature relevant to intercultural communication, cross-cultural management, and the internationalization of higher education. Consequently, my grand academic tour in the first year made me believe that doing research in the field of intercultural communication, especially in the context of the internationalization of higher education in China, was appropriate and timely in the following ways.

First, the research is rooted in the macro context of the internationalization of Chinese higher education, which is timely. Along with the rapid development of the economy and the improvement of people's living standards in China during the past three decades, more and more Chinese parents seek high-quality higher education for their children. However, many argue that the development of Chinese higher education fails to keep up with the pace of economic advancement and to meet the demands of citizens (e.g. Ennew & Yang, 2009; Hannum & Park, 2007; Huang, 2003). On the one hand, instead of entering domestic higher

education institutions, Chinese students increasingly choose to study abroad in spite of expensive tuition and maintenance fees. According to Huang (2003), the total number of self-funding students going abroad was approximately 23,000 from 1978 to 1989, but reached 160,000 in 1999. After that, the number has continued increasing every year, peaking at 374,500 in 2012, according to statistics from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MOE) (2013). On the other hand, the Chinese higher education market needs to be integrated into that of the world with China's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as well as its consent to the General Agreement on Trade in Services. According to WTO classification, education is one of the 12 major service sectors (WTO, 2002) and thus needs to be gradually opened to WTO member countries.

Accordingly, the Chinese government has been taking steps to introduce high quality foreign education resources to cooperate with Chinese higher education institutions (named "*zhong wai he zuo ban xue*" in Chinese). It can be divided into two forms, cooperative programmes and joint institutions (dependent and independent). The cooperative programmes and dependent joint institutions – Chinese institutions in collaboration with foreign partners – are the most popular in China in that they are only one part of Chinese higher education institutions, and are not independent economic entities. According to Huang (2007), only two joint programmes could lead to the award of qualifications from foreign universities in 1995. Nevertheless, the number of these cooperative structures had soared to 1775 by 2012 (MOE, 2013). In contrast with the increasing popularity of the former two types of cooperation, the Chinese government prevented the establishment of the third form (independent joint institutions) of cooperation until 2003, when a significant regulation, Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-foreign Co-operation in Running Schools, came into effect. Despite this, the Chinese government seemed to adopt a cautious attitude to this kind of joint entity, at least in the first decade of the twenty-first century. As a result of this, there were only two joint universities by the end of 2010: UNNC and Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University. The Chinese government announced at the outset of the implementation of the Regulation that this kind of entity was not

expected to develop further until the two universities had been fully evaluated (Ennew & Yang, 2009).

However, this situation changed in 2010 when the "National Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development" was released by the Party's Central Committee and the State Council. Article 49 of the Outline clearly states its intention of "introducing and promoting quality education resources…. enhancing a range of schools to develop a variety of international exchanges and cooperation; running some sample Sino-foreign cooperation schools well and a number of Sino-foreign cooperation programmes" (MOE, 2010; my translation). This means that the Chinese government has regarded "*zhong wai he zuo ban xue*" as a significant step towards promoting the opening up of education, and independent joint institutions have been encouraged by the Central Chinese government. This new initiative resulted in the establishment of the third joint university, named Shanghai New York University, in early 2011 (Jiang, 2011). There are now five Sino-foreign joint universities taking students and another three were approved by the Chinese government in 2012 (MOE, 2013).

The development of joint universities has received strong support from Chinese governments in spite of the late start. Thus, this kind of joint entity will probably become increasingly popular in China in the near future. Nevertheless, a comparatively new type of joint university also entails the complexity of the process of development, as mentioned previously. Likewise, this kind of complexity was also realized by some scholars in the UK. For instance, in contrast to the positive attitude of Chinese governments to Sino-foreign joint universities, some British scholars held differing points of view on this development. The British think tank Agora issued a report in 2007 (Fazackerley, 2007) named "British universities in China: the reality beyond the rhetoric", in which a range of challenges such as legal and regulatory difficulties, cultural challenges and operational management were presented. For British universities, setting up overseas campuses was regarded as a strategic mistake, or at least a risk, by professor Shattock of the London Institute of Education and David Pilsbury, chief executive of the Worldwide Universities Network, in this report. Despite this,

increasing numbers of higher education institutions, especially in the developed countries such as the UK, the US and Australia, are looking forward to establishing overseas branch campuses. It is reported by the Times Higher Education Supplement that "The number of branch campuses in world higher education soared from 12 in 2002 to 164 in 2009, according to the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education" (Morgan, 2011). It can be seen from the above analysis that the development of this type of entity is still subject to several factors such as legal and regulatory difficulties, cultural challenges and operational management in spite of the support from the Chinese government. It is thus timely to anchor the current study in this comparatively new realm.

A second reason for the timeliness of the present study is that the research setting is UNNC. UNNC, as the first Sino-foreign joint university, has received great attention while challenges faced in the course of cooperating and running it cannot be overlooked, such as policy barriers and managerial issues (Ennew & Yang, 2009). So far, studies of UNNC have mainly been concerned with the way in which it is operated, its teaching and learning strategy, the potential channels for financing the joint venture, and so forth. For example, Ennew and Yang (2009) discuss the challenges faced by UNNC in the course of development and operation within the context of the internationalization of higher education worldwide and the further opening to the world of Chinese higher education. A dissertation by Chen (2005) focuses on whether and how Chinese learners adjust their learning strategies under the British education system in China. Jin (2008) explores financing channels for Sino-foreign cooperation universities drawing on the experience of UNNC. However, as yet, no research has focused on intercultural communication between the staff from different cultures at UNNC, despite intercultural communication issues being perceived as one of the greatest obstacles to cooperation by the top leaders of both UNNC partners. My own experience supports this.

Indeed, the challenges of intercultural communication from the perspective of the staff at UNNC are various, partly owing to the complexity of the composition of the staff. The staff at UNNC can be roughly divided into two groups: expatriates

(non-Chinese) and HCS, approximately in the proportion of 200:150, according to data for the end of 2011. In terms of the former, some expatriates appointed by UoN are put in key academic and managerial positions, such as the Provost and Deans of Faculty, while the majority of the expatriates, who are recruited according to the UoN worldwide standard, fill the teaching and research positions. This cluster of staff are from more than 40 countries and regions but most of them are from commonwealth countries, particularly the UK, owing to the British background of UoN and the use of English as the official language. As for HCS at UNNC, most of them play a role in administrative and supportive work to maintain the normal operation of the university. Some of them are in charge of key administrative work, such as the Registrar, and the Directors of the human resources office, admissions office, and student affairs office. Chinese personnel have been recruited to these positions because they must maintain contact with the local government departments and residents, as well as provide services for the expatriates based on local resources. A number of them, having obtained overseas doctoral degrees or having had similar experiences in overseas higher education institutions, are recruited into teaching positions. Because of the nature of UNNC, HCS are required to have strong oral and written English communication skills, and hence those who have studied or worked abroad have greater opportunities to join UNNC. It can be seen from the above that the staff at UNNC originate from various countries with various work, language and cultural backgrounds; they have to speak English as a lingua franca on campus wherever they are from and whatever native language they speak. The diversity of this workforce inevitably means that intercultural communication issues emerge frequently. Given the intercultural and language diversity and the complexity of UNNC, a study of the intercultural communicative experiences of its staff from culturally different backgrounds is both important and timely.

Thirdly, the focus of this study on HCS, rather than the expatriates at UNNC, is also pragmatic and timely. Initially, I began with a focus on the expatriates rather than HCS since the literature in the field of intercultural communication was dominated by an emphasis on sojourners. As a naïve researcher, I naturally took this focus for granted until the summer of 2010, when I was back in China and

discussed my project with a colleague at UNNC. After listening to my description of the project, he asked me why I was not researching HCS's intercultural experiences, because he believed that their experiences were likewise worthy of exploration. Indeed, in terms of HCS, although the location of the campus is in China, the work environment is different from that of traditional Chinese universities: English is the official language rather than Chinese, the educational system follows the British one, and most of their superiors are expatriates. Hence, at least in the context of UNNC, they possibly felt much more like "sojourners" than the expatriates. Furthermore, within such a multicultural and comparatively new environment, it is not hard to imagine that HCS could face great challenges, especially in communicating with people from more than 40 countries. Their intercultural experiences are thus worth exploration in that they may enlighten others who may become involved in a similar environment.

Inspired by his suggestion, I revisited the relevant literature and confirmed my colleague's hunch. Academically, within the field of intercultural studies, the main concern of Chinese researchers exploring intercultural communication is different from that of foreign researchers: the former are mainly concerned with cross-cultural pragmatics, which "takes intercultural communication as its context and tries to make cultural comparisons of different language interactions in different cultural contexts", while the latter focus more attention on intercultural adaptation and intercultural training (Hu & Fan, 2011, p. 9). Furthermore, in the vast majority of these studies abroad, most attention has been paid to the experiences of sojourners, such as the dynamics of intercultural adaptation, culture shock and so forth. The impact on host country nationals' (HCNs) attitudes and behaviours of intercultural contact has been largely neglected. Indeed, in the little research on HCNs' intercultural contact, some researchers' work indicates that HCNs play an integral role in the quality and frequency of intercultural contact (e.g. Dunne, 2008; Toh, 2003; Varma, Pichler, Budhwar, & Biswas, 2009; Wang, 2010b). In practical terms, it was much easier for me to access HCS since I knew some of them, which was particularly important in recruiting participants and establishing rapport and trust with them in the data collection stage in the context of China. I discuss this in more detail in the methodology chapter.

Furthermore, I intended to explore their intercultural communication in depth, so sharing a common language (Mandarin Chinese) was beneficial: to me as it enabled me to understand their meaning; and to my participants in expressing themselves in a sophisticated way. Consequently, in 2010, I shifted the research focus from the expatriates to HCS.

Finally, having decided on the research subjects and the location, the last thing I needed to do was to determine the perspective and scope of my research. My intention was to reveal as many details as possible about how HCS make sense of and cope with cultural differences in their intercultural encounters. I gradually realised that my research interest was related to a significant concept in the exploration of organisational communication (Murphy, 2001; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005): sensemaking, which is about how "people organise to make sense of equivocal inputs and enact this sense back into the world more orderly" (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 410). The research on sensemaking is well developed in the field of management in monocultural organisations, but it is lacking in the context of intercultural encounters, and especially in the context of China. Furthermore, most of the research on sensemaking in organisations tends to be at the organisational rather than the interpersonal level. Thus, the research subjects of sensemaking are usually managers; by contrast, in my study, most of the research subjects are ordinary staff at UNNC, e.g. administrators, librarians and technicians. As such, my research aims to make a theoretical contribution by exploring sensemaking theories in intercultural contexts, and by providing new empirical evidence of sensemaking from the perspective of HCS.

In an organisational setting, people apply sensemaking as a result of differences between their perception of the current state of the world and their expectations, or when they have no obvious way to engage with others (Weick, et al., 2005). Louis (1980) further identifies three types of differences which could trigger sensemaking in organisational settings. These are change (an objective difference in a major feature between new and old settings), contrast (subjective perceptions of difference between new and old settings), and surprise (a difference between an individual's anticipations and subsequent experiences in the new setting). In

intercultural encounters, the surprise resulting from cultural differences tends to be the most apparent and hardest to overcome. Therefore, in this study I focus my attention on how people cope with cultural differences.

With these reasons in mind, I adopted an alternative approach to researching intercultural communication among staff in a multicultural environment by drawing on sensemaking theory to explore HCS's experiences of intercultural communication in a specific higher education institution in China. It is hoped that this study may contribute to a better understanding of HCS's intercultural communicative behaviour in intercultural encounters. Moreover, it is hoped that it will provide practical insights for both managers and other individuals in intercultural organisations.

1.2 Definition of terms

Having presented the research context and the development of the research topic, I now describe the key concepts involved in this research.

Culture

To define culture is a difficult task because it is a large and inclusive concept, and thus there exist over 500 definitions (Varner & Beamer, 2011). Nevertheless, it is important to define culture as I understand it vis-à-vis the research I am undertaking here. This study adopts Stead's (2004) definition: a social system of shared symbols, meaning, perspective, and social actions that are mutually negotiated by people in their relationships with others (p. 392). Underlying this definition is the social constructionist view of culture, which "focuses more on the relationships between people and their co-construction of culture in a changing environment" (Stead, 2004, p. 393).

Communication and intercultural communication

The term "communication" is defined as "the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium" (Oxford online dictionary, 2012), which means that people can impart or exchange information by

interpersonal contact or some mass medium such as TV or the Internet. To provide a working definition, communication here refers to inter-personal processes of exchanging information, since the word "exchange" highlights the interactive nature of communication. Intercultural communication thus involves interpersonal communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

In addition, when the concept of intercultural communication was first introduced in China, there were five or six translations matching the concept of communication, e.g. *jiao ji* (交际; to contact), *jiao liu* (交流; to exchange)，*gou tong* (沟通: to connect), *chuan bo* (传播; to disseminate) (Hu, 2010). Nowadays, two versions, *kuawenhua jiaoji* (跨文化交际) and *kuawenhua chuanbo* (跨文化传播), are interchangeably matched with the term 'intercultural communication'. *Jiao ji* and *chuan bo* have slightly different meanings (Xinhua Online Dictionary, 2013). The former refers to interpersonal contact and socialization, while the latter means the transfer of information through interpersonal or communication tools. Accordingly, the former is usually adopted by those researchers who have foreign language backgrounds, while the latter is adopted by media researchers (Hu, 2010). However, Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) embrace Yan's (1987) viewpoint that the Chinese phrase "*gou ton*g" reaches the essence of human communication, and it emphasizes the interactive nature of communication. In addition, the notion of *gou tong* parallels a view of communication as "the process by which we understand others and in turn endeavour to be understood by them. It is dynamic, constantly changing and shifting in response to the total situation" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 7; cited in Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 5). Additionally, communication in the field of Chinese cross-cultural management is mostly translated as "*gou tong*" on the Internet. Thus, this study adopts "*gou tong*" and "*kuawenhua goutong*" to correspond to the Western terms "communication" and "intercultural communication" respectively. The confusion surrounding the term "intercultural communication" to some extent illustrates the complexity and immaturity of intercultural communication in the field of Chinese intercultural communication.

Sensemaking and (inter)cultural sensemaking

Sensemaking refers to the processes through which individuals make sense of the unknown so as to act on it (Weick, 1995; Weick, et al., 2005). Cultural sensemaking refers to the process by which people make sense of culturally different behaviour in order to respond to it (Osland & Bird, 2000). In the sensemaking literature, the terms cultural sensemaking and intercultural sensemaking are used interchangeably (e.g. Osland, Bird, & Gundersen, 2007). In analysing the data for this study, I adopt the term intercultural sensemaking, since it highlights the intercultural feature of the context in which sensemaking takes place. Further explanation of the above two concepts will be provided in chapter two.

Chinese and foreigner

The word 'Chinese' usually generalises all the people with Chinese ethnic heritage including Chinese from the People's Republic of China or mainland China, Taiwanese, Hongkongese, Singaporean Chinese, etc., and even Malaysian Chinese in research by some western scholars (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; Holmes, 2000). In fact, the Chinese from outside mainland China have been isolated from one another for a long time owing to political factors, and therefore they have diverged from one another, although they share much cultural heritage such as Confucianism and Daoism (Taoism). For example, people from Taiwan and Hong Kong identify themselves as Taiwanese and Hongkongese rather than Chinese. To avoid confusion and ambiguity, in this study Chinese refers in particular to the Chinese people of mainland China. In contrast, the expatriates, who are not from mainland China, are usually called foreigners, *lao wai* (老外；an informal name for a foreigner), and foreign teachers by HCS at UNNC.

1.3 Organisation of the study

In this chapter, I introduced the context and development of the research topic, and stated the research aims in section 1.1. I also clarified the main terms adopted in this study in section 1.2. I now conclude this chapter with an overview of the organisation of this study.

Following this introductory chapter, chapter two provides the theoretical background to the present study. In section 2.1, I identify my social constructionist approach to the current research. Section 2.2 briefly reviews some models related to Chinese intercultural communication through mainstream approaches and discusses their limitations. Section 2.3 introduces the analytical framework of this study: sensemaking and its applications. In section 2.4, I discuss the possible influence of individual factors on sensemaking with respect to personality and intercultural competence. Section 2.5 reviews some empirical studies relevant to the current study. The chapter finishes by setting out the research questions, based on the conclusions of the above discussion.

In chapter three I discuss the methodology used in this study. I first explain the qualitative research strategy (section 3.1) and data collection methods (section 3.2). In section 3.3, I describe the fieldwork procedures. Section 3.4 covers the data analysis strategy and procedures. Sections 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 discuss ethical issues, validity and reliability, and reflexivity, respectively.

Chapter four presents the empirical findings related to research question one, which deals with the participants' interpretation of cultural differences between themselves and the expatriates. The purpose of this chapter is to make sense of cultural differences noticed by the interpreters (in this study, the HCS). The findings deal with personality (section 4.1), communication styles (section 4.2) and cultural values (section 4.3). The analysis in this chapter proposes plausible causes for the strategies the participants adopt in consequent interactions with the expatriates.

Chapter five answers the remaining three research questions by identifying patterns in the ways the participants react to cultural differences, exploring the possible reasons behind negative reactions (section 5.1), and seeking an in-depth understanding of the processes of intercultural sensemaking (section 5.2). Subsequently, I discuss the outcomes of intercultural sensemaking by drawing on the transformational model of the development of intercultural competence developed by Glaser, et al. (2007).

Chapter six is the conclusion of this thesis. In this final chapter, I first provide a summary of the research findings (section 6.1), and then offer a model of HCS's intercultural interaction from the perspective of sensemaking (section 6.2). Subsequently, I outline the theoretical, methodological and practical contributions and implications of this study (section 6.3). Afterwards, I discuss my personal reflections on the research journey I have taken (section 6.4). Finally, I highlight the limitations of this study (section 6.5) and thus offer some directions for further research (section 6.6).

Chapter 2 Literature review

As stated in the opening chapter, in this study I aim to explore the host Chinese staff's (HCS) experiences of intercultural communication with their expatriate counterparts in the context of a specific higher education institution in China. In order to understand the process of their intercultural interaction, I apply a social constructionist approach to the research aims. Identifying a particular approach is essential to the research since it guides the whole research process. The literature on social constructionism is reviewed in the first section of this chapter. Subsequently, I discuss some influential studies related to Chinese communication in order to establish what is known in the extant literature and refine the focus of attention of this study. After that, I elaborate on Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory and its application in intercultural studies in order to draw on an analytical framework for this study. I then discuss the possible individual factors affecting sensemaking by looking at two aspects, personality and intercultural competence. Finally, I present some empirical studies in intercultural communication in China in order to reach the conclusions and the formulation of the research questions.

Thus, this chapter starts with a brief review of the key aspects of a social constructionist approach to intercultural communication, in combination with some concepts derived from traditional Chinese philosophy, in section 2.1. Section 2.2 discusses some influential studies about Chinese communication in mainstream intercultural studies. Section 2.3 elaborates on the analytical framework for this study: cultural sensemaking. Sections 2.4 illustrates factors influencing the process of cultural sensemaking. Section 2.5 reviews some empirical research in the context of China. Lastly, the conclusions and implications for further research are synthesized and the research questions of this study are presented (section 2.6).

2.1 The philosophical foundations of the study

In this first section, I clarify my philosophical stance in undertaking the current study: social constructionism, in association with traditional Chinese philosophy. Thus, I discuss the key aspects of social constructionism and some useful concepts derived from traditional Chinese wisdom.

Social constructionism, defined by Rubin and Rubin (2012) as interpretive constructionism, refers to a philosophy of how ordinary people come to define reality in their everyday life, and thus how they acquire and use knowledge to guide their behaviour (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). That is what I aim to explore in my study: how HCS use their socially constructed reality to guide their communicative behaviour with their expatriate counterparts at UNNC. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), the reality of everyday life is constructed, rather than existing independently of observers, through individuals and groups interacting together in a social system. Thus it is socially constructed. Berger and Luckmann contend that all knowledge is derived and maintained in the course of human beings' interactions with one another within society. Thus, they argue that the most important kind of social interaction is face-to-face communication with other people, and socially constructed reality is reproduced through ongoing reciprocal fluid flexible interactions. This implies that language is central, as it serves as the dominant carrier of categories and meanings and the medium providing much of the raw material for activity (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999). Similarly, language is seen as a pre-condition for thought, since "the way a person thinks, the very categories and concepts that provide a framework of meaning for them, are provided by the language that they use" (Burr, 2003, p. 8). Therefore, HCS's experiences of intercultural communication become the main source of knowledge in this study.

Accordingly, a social constructionist enquiry focuses on "the social practices engaged in by people, and their interactions with each other" (Burr, 2003, p. 9). It is concerned with "the construction of relationships, the process of such interaction, and their meaning-making" rather than the nature of things (Stead, 2004, p. 391). Social constructionism also considers knowledge and social action

together, since people's different constructions of the world bring about different kinds of action (Burr, 2003). In addition, from a social constructionist perspective, all forms of knowledge are historically and culturally specific (Burr, 2003). A social constructionist "locates meaning in an understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within a social community context (Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1996, p. 80). Thus, in undertaking this study and being guided by social constructionism, I should pay attention to how HCS make meaning through the processes of interaction, the behaviour that is guided by this constructed knowledge, the nature of the relationships HCS have with their expatriate colleagues as a result of this constructed knowledge, and the social context in which intercultural interaction happens.

In addition to the inspiration of social constructionism, I also draw on some researchers' work derived from Asian philosophy, which is closely related to the current study. For example, Miike (2003; 2007; 2010) advocates putting Asian values and ideals at the centre in investigating Asian intercultural phenomena; he labels his approach an Asiancentric one. He further summarizes three central concepts underlying Asian worldviews: relationality, the circularity of life and death, and harmony. Relationality and circularity assume that "everyone and everything are interrelated across space and time" (Miike, 2003, p. 252). This ontological assumption leads to a relational epistemological assumption: everyone and everything become meaningful in relation to others (Miike, 2003, p. 253), and this relationality is socially constructed through communication. This epistemological assumption parallels the social constructionist one stated above. A number of scholars (e.g. Chen & Starosta, 2003; Deardorff, 2009; Fang & Faure, 2011; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998) have referred to Miike's notion of relationality in the field of intercultural communication. The notion is also applied in numerous empirical studies (e.g. Chen, 2010; Holmes, 2005; Holmes & O'Neill, 2005, 2012). All these studies have enhanced the importance of Miike's work.

In addition to relationality and circularity, harmony is another important concept in Chinese communication. Harmony is considered the ultimate good in two traditional Chinese philosophies: Confucianism and Taoism (Miike, 2003).

Guo-Ming Chen has done a series of studies investigating the role of harmony in Chinese communication. For example, Chen (2008) proposes a harmony theory of Chinese communication. In interpersonal interaction, he points out that harmony is the ultimate goal Chinese people pursue and it can be achieved by appropriate application of *guan xi* (the relationship between two parties), *mian zi* (reputation, self-esteem, or face gained from the respect of other persons in interactions), and power (the control of resources valued by other parties) (Chen, 2008, pp. 221-228). The importance of harmony in Chinese interpersonal communication has also been identified by numerous other studies (e.g. Chang & Holt, 1993; Chang, Holt, & Lin, 2004; Chen, 2002; Holmes, 2008; Hwang, 2004; Jia, 2001; Kirkbride, Tang, & Westwood, 1991; Wei & Li, 2013). For example, Jia (2001) explores harmony from the perspective of *mian zi*; Hwang (2004) proposes a conflict management model by integrating the concept of *main zi* and *guan xi* on the basis of harmony; Chang and Holt (1993) show that harmony can be enhanced by an appropriate execution of *guan xi*; Chang, Holt and Lin (2004) connect the harmonious *guan xi* to the concept of *yuan* (destined relations). These studies highlight the importance of Chinese traditional worldviews in understanding Chinese communicative behaviour.

However, Miike's (2003; 2007; 2010) Asiacentric and Chen's (2008) "Chinacentric" approaches, like US- or Eurocentric approaches, to intercultural communication have also met challenges and questions (e.g. Chen, 2004; Kuo & Chew, 2009). They risk essentialising the behaviour of people from a particular geographical world location, and hence fall victim to the ethnocentric epistemological bias they seek to address. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned concepts are helpful in understanding HCS's communicative behaviour in intercultural encounters as they reflect Chinese values and worldviews in general. Therefore, these concepts, in association with the social constructionist approach, encompass the backdrop for this study.

In summary, the social constructionist framework guides me to explore HCS's intercultural experiences by focusing on the context, interpersonal relations, and HCS's intercultural communication in the processes of interpersonal interaction

with their non-Chinese counterparts. In addition, attention will be paid to those communication concepts related to Chinese traditional philosophy. Having clarified my social constructionist stance, I next examine some key approaches to understanding Chinese communication. In particular, some key concepts and strategies that Chinese people are likely to employ in their communication with others will be discussed.

2.2 Various approaches to understanding Chinese communication

In the preceding section, I have clarified my social constructionist stance to explore HCS's intercultural experiences at UNNC. However, in the fields of cross-cultural management and intercultural communication, the mainstream perspectives are dominated by positivists and postpositivists. Thus, in order to help to understand HCS's intercultural experiences, this section illustrates some influential models related to Chinese (intercultural) communication, including the theoretical basis underlying these models and their limitations.

2.2.1 Theoretical basis

In the field of intercultural communication, different understandings of culture and cultural differences lead to different research camps. The dominant understanding of culture is essentialist: "it treats **culture as something people have** or to which they belong" (Piller, 2011, p. 15; original boldface). Essentialism believes that culture is static, homogeneous, and able to be objectively described and measured (Bjerregaard, Lauring, & Klitmøller, 2009). Under this understanding, the notion of culture is equivalent to national culture, and cultural differences are perceived as sources of conflict, friction or miscommunication (Søderberg & Holden, 2002). Thus, the focus of intercultural communication research under this assumption is on the communicative characteristics of different countries. In this camp, Edward T. Hall's high- and low-context communication theory and Geert Hofstede's hypothesis of value orientations have had worldwide influence in the development of intercultural research.

As a pioneer of intercultural communication research, Edward T. Hall distinguished between national cultures with an emphasis on the close relationship between culture and communication. From his viewpoint, "Culture is communication and communication is culture" (Hall, 1959, p. 186). Therefore, he claimed that national culture and human interaction differed on a continuum that ranged from high to low context, based on differences in modes of communicating messages (Hall, 1976). Specifically, people from high-context cultures prefer to use more contextual resources and fewer verbal messages to convey meaning. In contrast, people in low-context cultures tend to pay more attention to verbal explicitness instead of contextual resources. Hall's model concerns the rules around information exchange and the degree to which information is explicit. Therefore, his model underpins an assumption that the more one learns of another culture, the closer one comes to understanding the messages. Many scholars (e.g. Bjerregaard, et al., 2009; Prasad, 2003) argue that this perspective puts emphasis on the cognitive dimension of intercultural understanding, but ignores politics- and power-related issues in intercultural communicative encounters.

In addition to Hall's high-low culture, Hofstede's (1980, 1991) work on the four dimensions of national cultures is closely related and much cited in intercultural studies. He later added a fifth dimension, long-term/short-term orientation, based on Michael Harris Bond and his colleagues' study of a Chinese value survey (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). The five dimensions are power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculine/feminine, uncertainty avoidance, and long-short-orientation (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2005). Like Hall's context theory, Hofstede's cultural value model has also been heavily criticised in recent years by many scholars from different perspectives, such as in terms of methodology, management, and philosophy (e.g. Fang, 2005-2006; Holden, 2002; McSweeney, 2002; Piller, 2011; Schwartz, 1994).

Despite their limitations, the above two models have been highly influential in the field of intercultural communication research (Guo, 2007). For example, according to the above two frameworks, Chinese culture falls towards the high-context end (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005), and has: 1) a relatively high

power distance; 2) a tendency toward collectivism; 3) a tendency toward masculinity; 4) a low level of uncertainty avoidance; and 5) a strong long-term orientation (Hofstede, et al., 2005). So far, the vast majority of studies relevant to Chinese intercultural communication use these two frameworks, as is exemplified in the following subsection.

2.2.2 Some influential models of Chinese communication

Using the above-mentioned frameworks, a number of researchers have developed taxonomies of characteristics of intercultural communication in diverse cultures. This subsection illustrates two models for looking at the ways in which Chinese people (and people from other cultures) may communicate with others.

Ting-Toomey (1999) illustrates some characteristics of Hall's (1976) high-low context communication (see Figure 2.1 below), in combination with Hofstede's (1980, 1991) dimensions of individualism/collectivism, power distance, and long/short-term orientation. According to their work, China is located on the far right of the continuum of high-context communication.

LCC characteristics	HCC characteristics
Individualistic values	Group-oriented values
Self-face concern	Mutual-face concern
Linear logic	Spiral logic
Direct style	Indirect style
Person-oriented style	Status-oriented style
Self-enhancement style	Self-effacement style
Speaker-oriented style	Listener-oriented style
Verbal-based understanding	Context-based understanding

LCC examples			HCC examples
Germany	United States	Saudi Arabia	Japan
Switzerland	Canada	Kuwait	China
Denmark	Australia	Mexico	South Korea
Sweden	United Kingdom	Nigeria	Vietnam

Figure 2.1 The Low-Context Communication (LCC) and High-Context Communication (HCC) Frameworks (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 101)

Generally, low- and high-context communication is closely related to individualistic/collectivistic values. According to Hofstede (1980, 1991),

individualism values the importance of individual identity above group identity, individual rights above group rights, and individual needs above group needs. In contrast, collectivism values the importance of the "we" identity above the "I" identity, group rights above individual rights, and in-group needs above individual wants and desires. Individualism promotes self-efficiency, individual responsibility, and personal autonomy, while collectivism promotes relational interdependence, in-group harmony, and in-group collaborative spirit.

The notion of face is important in the field of intercultural communication since it can explain communicative behaviour in some ways. Face represents "one's dignity, self-respect, and prestige" (Hofstede & Bond, 1988, p. 8). People from individualistic cultures are more likely to protect their own face, while people from collectivistic cultures tend to protect the other's face (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998).

The differences between the linear and spiral logic persuasion mode are closely related to the direct/indirect communication mode and verbal-based/context-based understanding. People with a linear logic prefer to use a direct communication mode. In this mode, the meaning is revealed in the speaker's verbal expression. Speakers tend to say "no" or "yes" directly to express their own opinions in order to get to the point straight away. In other words, the speaker's real meaning is expressed through words. In contrast, people favouring the spiral mode persuasion style tend to use an indirect communication mode, making use of context-based understanding such as body language, changing the topic, or maintaining silence. When making a request or complaint, they are likely to talk "around and around the point, in effect putting all the pieces in place except the crucial one" (Hall, 1976, p. 113), or "beat around the bush" and subtly drop the point. In this mode of communication, the listener is expected to pick up the speaker's real meaning concealed in the context.

Apart from what has been discussed above, the contrast between low- and high-context communication can be seen in some other respects, such as person-oriented style versus status-oriented style, self-enhancement style versus self-effacement style, and speaker-oriented style versus listener-oriented style.

Status-oriented communication pays more attention to relative social status and the appropriateness of behaviour in the interaction. Self-effacement style emphasizes "humbling oneself via verbal restraints, hesitations, modest talk, and the use of self-deprecation concerning one's effort or performance" (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 107). These two communication styles, together with a listener-oriented style are encouraged by Confucian doctrine, emphasizing social order, hierarchical respect and collective face-saving.

Under the Confucian doctrine, the ways in which people communicate depend on their social status. For example, in front of elders or superiors, youngsters or subordinates need to talk modestly and listen to them on public occasions. By doing this, high power distance is also manifested. In addition, showing off is not encouraged, especially for youngsters. Modesty is regarded as a virtue in Chinese tradition. In contrast, person-oriented communicators value respecting unique personal identities. The self-enhancement style emphasizes "the importance of boasting about one's accomplishments and abilities" (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 107). The speaker-oriented style also encourages people to express their own ideas verbally. In other words, these communication styles attempt to stress the importance of an individual rather than a group.

Ting-Toomey's (1999) framework illustrates different communication styles related to different cultural values. This cross-culture approach has been widely applied in intercultural studies (Guo, 2007). Following the same approach, a number of researchers have conducted influential research on Chinese communicative behaviour (e.g. Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Gao, Ting-Toomey, & Gudykunst, 1996). For example, considering traditional Chinese culture, Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998, p. 19) contend that "the Chinese conception of self is relational, other oriented, and influenced by complex hierarchy and role relationship". Meanwhile, the position one occupies and the role one plays guides the way for Chinese to perceive themselves in relation to others and how they engage in communication with others. As a result, "the primary functions of communication in Chinese culture are to maintain existing relationships among individuals, to reinforce role and status differences, and preserve harmony within

the group" (p. 6). Consequently, talk is usually associated with negative consequences and real meaning is usually therefore implied through the use of very few words in Chinese culture. Given this conceptual framework and these premises, they put forward five major characteristics of Chinese communication:

1. *Han xu* (含蓄; "Implicit communication"): refers to a mode of communication (both verbal and nonverbal) contained, reserved, implicit, and indirect. "To be *han xu*, one does not spell out everything but leaves the "unspoken" to the listeners" (p. 37).

2. Ting hua (听话; "Listening-centeredness"): meaning to listen to talk. Focus on listening becomes "a predominant mode of communication" in Chinese culture in that "a spoken 'voice' is equated with seniority, authority, age, experience, knowledge, and expertise" (p. 42).

3. *Ke qi* (客气; Politeness): "a thoughtful, mannerly, pleasant, and civil fashion to communicate with people" (p. 45).

4. *Zi ji ren* (自己人; insiders): a focus on insiders, which means that the ways Chinese communicate differentiate insiders from outsiders. Chinese are inclined to communicate explicitly with someone they know (insiders), implicitly and even rarely with those who are perceived as outsiders.

5. Face-directed. The concern for face permeates many aspects of Chinese communication.

As a result of the above five key aspects of Chinese communication, Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) claim that there are at least eight areas of communication divergence between Chinese and North Americans: (a) the importance of what is not said versus what is said, (b) the use of *we* versus *I*, (c) polite versus impolite talk, (d) indirect versus direct talk, (e) hesitant versus assertive speech, (f) self-effacing versus self-enhancing talk, (g) private versus public personal questions, and (h) reticent versus expressive speech.

It can be seen that some of the five characteristics of Chinese communication overlap with Ting-Toomey's (1999) HCC framework. For instance, *han xu* implies indirectness, and *ting hua* means a listener-oriented style in HCC. Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) try to use words from Chinese to illustrate Chinese

communication styles.

2.2.3 Limitations and implications of previous studies

The above studies are useful in providing explanations for many behavioural differences between Chinese and people from different cultures. Some of the differences are clearly manifested in my data. However, the limitations are also apparent, especially when applying these dimensions for understanding individual Chinese behaviours, as these dimensions are too broad, and individuals' behaviours are affected by various factors. First, the above works treat culture as separate from social context and time, which might be appropriate in a pre-globalization and pre-Internet society, but not necessarily in a new social environment of globalization with "borderless and wireless cultural learning, knowledge transfer, and synchronized information sharing" (Fang, 2010, p. 166).

With respect to this study, the social backgrounds of HCS at UNNC and contemporary Chinese society itself are very complex, partly owing to the huge imbalance in development between different regions in China and the great changes which have happened in the past three decades. In eastern coastal areas of China, such as Ningbo city where UNNC is located, this complexity is linked to the development of the economy and the resulting improvement in people's living standards. Economic development can exert an influence on culture and vice versa. Leung (2006) exemplifies this: the economic success of east Asia may be aided by values associated with long-term orientation, while its development may also propel important value changes. For example, thrift and frugality has been thought a core Chinese value. However, according to Faure and Fang (2008), China will most probably become the world's second largest market for luxury goods, which means Chinese consumers are moving away from the "saving" culture of older generations. Chinese people, especially young people, are tending to adopt things from the developed countries such as fashion, thoughts and worldview. In the context of UNNC, the majority of HCS have had overseas experiences and have worked with people from more than forty countries. These overseas work and study experiences may have influenced how they understand intercultural

communication in multicultural organisations like UNNC.

Along with the development of the economy, people's ideology has gradually changed since the implementation of the "reforming and opening policy" started in the late 1970s. The Chinese government gave people more freedom in their private lives and ideology. For instance, when I was a primary school student in the 1970s, Confucius was presented as being evil rather than a sage. We were encouraged to sing "revolutionary" poems and read cartoons demonizing Confucius and attacking Confucian values. At that time, people were usually asked to recite the analects of Mao Zedong, the chairman and founder of the People's Republic of China, to consolidate their ideology. Individuals had to absolutely comply with the needs of organisations. As a result, it was normal for a female and male to get married because of an arrangement by the organisation. However, nowadays, people are increasingly aware of free thought and their own rights, especially well-educated people. They tend to be ready to accept new things according to their own standards, instead of passively accepting the political ideology of the government. Accordingly, within this complex social context of current Chinese society, an understanding of HCS's cultural communicative behaviour should take the contemporary social and political context into consideration.

Second, the above essentialist models downplay individual agency in intercultural interaction. Dao (2011) presumes that the primary purpose of these models is to compare cultures rather than handle understanding of intercultural interaction. Thus, they cannot explain the complexity of interpersonal interaction, especially in intercultural encounters. This complexity is termed "cultural realism" which "not only acknowledges the influence of national structures but also allows for the agency of the individual" by Holliday (2010, p. 259). Holliday's empirical work finds that national cultural characteristics are still there and play a role in intercultural communication. However, simultaneously, individual factors such as personality, previous experiences and attitudes are also significant in interpersonal communication. They interconnect with each other in a specific context and co-shape the complexity of intercultural communication. Similarly, Piller (2011, p.

73) clearly shows how to gain an understanding of intercultural communication by bearing in mind the question "who makes culture relevant to whom in which context for which purposes?", which stresses the impact of the interlocutor, the context and the purpose of intercultural communication.

Third, the above essentialist models also fail to consider the double influence of power on intercultural communication. Lauring (2011) points out that interpersonal communication cannot be separated from power relations since it implies not only the transfer of information but also relationship building and social organisation. Power exerts influence on the kinds of meaning that are constructed (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Martin and Nakayama further point out that the sources of power in intercultural communication vary according to individual status, such as age, ethnicity and educational background, and to social status, e.g. position in the organisation. In effect, the one-way influence of power on Chinese communication is stressed by the above two models, such as their emphasis on a listener-oriented communication style and *ting hua*.

In addition, several empirical studies (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999a; Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999b; Marschan, Welch, & Welch, 1997; Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari, & Säntti, 2005) have identified language as a source of power in the context of multinational corporations. Those who are proficient in the language of the company's operation are "in the most advantageous position of being able to access a wide range of information, to network across the company and to act as go-between for others" (Piller, 2011, p. 87). In terms of UNNC, the main administrators are from UoN, the educational system adopted is British, and English is the official language. All of these factors might be disadvantageous to HCS, especially those who never had the chance to experience the British higher educational system. It is possible that they may perceive themselves as being inferior in communication with their expatriate counterparts.

However, in higher power distance cultures like China people of higher status such as superiors in organisations or elders in the family tend to expect others to "*ting hua*", rather than themselves. In this case, they tend to be speaker-oriented

rather than listener-oriented. As stated in Chapter 1, not all of the expatriates are from English-speaking countries and some HCS have high positions at UNNC. If intercultural communication occurs between two such people, the characteristics of HCC might not apply. Therefore, the influence of power on intercultural communication partly depends on the context and the roles of the two parties in intercultural interaction.

Fourth, these bi-polar models cannot explain the paradoxical nature of culture (Fang, 2010; Osland & Bird, 2000). The notion of paradox refers to the existence of "contradictory yet interrelated elements – elements that seem logical in isolation but absurd and irrational when appearing simultaneously" (Lewis, 2000, p. 760). The bipolar dimensions of culture such as individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity could coexist in one culture, and be "both-and" rather than "either-or", depending on the context and circumstances under consideration (Fang, 2010; Osland & Bird, 2000). Therefore, as stated above, the same person may be speaker-oriented on one occasion but listener-oriented on another depending on many factors on the particular communicative occasion, e.g. his/her social status, the interlocutor, and the context.

The paradoxical nature of Chinese culture is also manifested in the Chinese language. Numerous Chinese phrases and words comprise opposite words (Faure & Fang, 2008). Indeed, the English noun "switch" is *kai guan* in Chinese; *kai* means "turn on" and *guan* means "turn off". Similarly, business or deals in Chinese can be expressed by *mai mai* (买卖；buying and selling); contact can be translated by *wang lai* (往来；coming and going); "each other" is *bi ci* (彼此；you and me), and so forth. In addition, according to Fang and Faure (2011), there exist at least five pairs of contradictory Chinese communication characteristics in today's China, depending on the context and situation of the communicator:

- Implicit communication vs. explicit communication;

- Listening-centred communication vs. speaking-centred communication;

- Polite communication vs. impolite communication;

- Insider-oriented communication vs. outsider-oriented communication;

- Face-directed communication vs. non-face-directed communication.

In effect, the paradoxical nature of culture exists not only in Chinese culture but is also evident in other cultures. Osland and Bird (2000) exemplify the individualistic features of U.S. Americans and Indians in some situations and their collectivistic ones in others, and for Japanese people lower and higher tolerances of uncertainty coexist.

In summary, although the above-mentioned models relevant to Chinese culture and communication could provide some understanding of the participants' cultural behaviours in intercultural encounters, they do not appear to take the social or organisational context, the mutual influence of power, and individual factors into consideration, which might considerably influence the strategies of communicating parties. Further, from the perspective of paradox, opposite values may co-exist in one culture depending on the time and circumstances. With these considerations in mind, I now introduce a social constructionist approach to intercultural interaction, drawing on Weick's (1995) work on sensemaking.

2.3 A sensemaking perspective on intercultural interaction

As illustrated in the above section, the essentialist approaches do not sufficiently explain the diversity and complexity of interpersonal interaction in a complex society and thus have been increasingly abandoned in research on interpersonal intercultural communication, e.g. Holliday (2010), Holmes and O'Neill (2012), and Piller (2011). In order to overcome the limitations of the essentialist approaches, a social constructionist approach started to emerge in the 1980s in the field of intercultural communication in the workplace. Piller (2011) points out that this approach treats culture as dynamic and socially constructed during the process of interaction in a given context. Thus, the concept of culture only comes into existence "in relation to and in contrast with other cultural communities" (Holden, 2002, p. 112). At the same time, this approach does not deny the influence of national cultural values on intercultural communication, but takes

other factors such as individual agency and contextual factors into consideration.

Under this understanding of culture, cultural differences are perceived as a resource for organisational learning, in contrast to being a communication barrier perceived as essentialist, as in the work of Hall and Hofstede (Holden, 2002). For example, Hoecklin (1995, p. 15) maintains that culture "should not simply be seen as an obstacle to doing business across cultures. It can provide tangible benefits and can be used competitively". The empirical studies by Morosini (1998) and Gertsen and Søderberg (2000) also indicate that cultural differences might serve a positive purpose since these differences force the organisation members to reflect on their practice and thereby contribute to new insights for their organisations from diverse perspectives.

Following this understanding of culture and cultural differences, social constructionists have explored the dynamic process of culture from diverse perspectives by focusing on "the organisational actors' interpretations, identity constructions and sensemaking processes" (Holden, 2002, p. 212). The process of sensemaking is particularly relevant to the present study because it synthesizes individuals' interpretations, identity constructions and reactions, and thereby enables a thorough exploration of how HCS interpret their constructions of cultural differences and subsequent communicative action guided by their constructed reality in the context of UNNC. Thus, in the next section I first describe Weick's (1995) concept of sensemaking and its importance to an organisation. Then I discuss two streams of research applying it in intercultural contexts and its limitations.

2.3.1 Conceptualising sensemaking

The concept of sensemaking has various meanings and interpretations. However, in the context of organisational settings, this term was initially developed by Karl E. Weick (1988, 1993, 1995). Sensemaking is about making sense of things, for instance, uncertainties and ambiguities, which relate to individual and social activity (Weick, 1995). Weick contends that this process comprises at least seven interrelated properties: identity construction, retrospect, enactment, social activity,

ongoing processes, extracted cues, and plausibility. For sensemaking to occur, each property must interact with (one or more) others. This is an ongoing process that is grounded in identity constructions in relation to others. That is, who we are influences how we interpret events. It is retrospective. That is, the actors rely on their lived experiences to make sense of the present. Sensemaking creates a sensible environment: "organisational actors produce part of the environment while doing things in words that create the constraints and opportunities of this environment" (Søderberg & Holden, 2002, p. 115). In this regard, communication becomes central to social sensemaking (Weick, et al., 2005). In other words, sensemaking can be defined as:

> Tak[ing] place in interactive talk and draw[ing] on the resources of language in order to formulate and exchange through talk… As this occurs, a situation is talked into existence and the basis is laid for action to deal with it. (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 58; cited in Weick, et al., 2005, p. 413).

In addition, sensemaking is influenced by a variety of social factors, such as the organisational culture surrounding the actor and how others cope with similar social and communicative events located in and around the organisation. It relies on the cues extracted from the situation to make a plausible explanation for the subsequent reaction.

In order to explain the process of sensemaking, I use a virtual story to decode it. Assume that there is an elephant, which of course is constituted of many elements (such as legs, head, tail, and so on), in a very small room with some people in different positions in the room. Thus, they cannot figure out all the elements in a very short time and make sense of the elephant in a sophisticated way. As a result, everyone in the room makes a plausible interpretation based on what he/she has seen (the extracted cues). Which part a person has picked up (which becomes a cue) and how to interpret (extract) it depend on many factors such as the angle at which one stands in front of the elephant (the context) and the experience the person has previously had relevant to elephants (personal lived experience). These factors affect not only what is extracted as a cue in the first place, but how the extracted cue is then interpreted (Weick, 1995). After that, everyone in the room

needs to take action towards the elephant based on the extracted cues. Most likely, the action will not be accurate but will seem plausible since the elephant is too big to work out clearly and instantly.

Put simply, Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory aims to explore the process through which people give meaning to experience. It "involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing" (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 409). Indeed, in a multicultural organisation like UNNC diverse cultural backgrounds and languages among the members exert the potential for them to make sense of an interlocutor's unexpected behaviour from time to time. Therefore, this theory provides a perspective from which to understand how HCS give meaning to their intercultural experiences by making full use of their own reference of culture and lived experiences.

In the latest decade, intercultural researchers have applied this concept to the understanding of culture-related issues, such as cultural differences between members in multicultural organisations, from diverse perspectives for different purposes. In addition, sensemaking is also regarded as one component of intercultural competence in the workplace by Glaser, et al. (2007). Thus, I next discuss its applications in the field of international management in order to further clarify the focus of this study.

2.3.2 The applications of sensemaking and its limitations

In the field of international management, a sensemaking approach is used to understand how culture is embedded in people's interactions in diverse contexts such as international joint ventures (e.g. Clark & Soulsby, 2009; Dao, 2011; Vaara, 2000) and international business collaborations (e.g. Bird & Osland, 2005-2006; Osland & Bird, 2000). Thus, this subsection discusses the applications of sensemaking and its limitations, at the organisational level and individual level.

At the organisational level, sensemaking tends to occur when people perceive that the current state is different from what they expected. That unexpected state becomes an event when people try to give it a meaning as a cause for a

consequent action. In an organisational layer, such unexpected states most likely occur when the organisation is experiencing a disruption to the existing organisational routines, such as organisational change (a merger, layoff or expansion), crisis or the arrival of a new chief executive officer. Weick (1995) calls these events "organisational shocks". These disruptions trigger organisation members to make sense of things differently. Sensemaking provides a useful heuristic for analysing and thereby revealing the nature of these disruptions (Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010). Whether an organisation goes smoothly through an "organisational shock", to some extent depends on its members' sensemaking capabilities, especially those of its top managers. Therefore, sensemaking is also regarded as a key leadership capability, since it "enables leaders to have a grasp of what is going on in their environments, thus facilitating other leadership activities such as visioning, relating, and inventing" (Ancona, 2012, p. 3). Ancona's account also highlights the significance of sensemaking within an organisation. Accordingly, the sensemaking model has been widely used as an analytical framework to explain organisational events (e.g. Mills & Weatherbee, 2006; Mullen, Vladi, & Mills, 2006; Weick, 1993).

Based on an analysis of extensive ethnographic material from eight cases of Finnish-Swedish mergers and acquisitions, Vaara's (2000) study explores how 200 top decision-makers made sense of and handled cultural differences in post-merger integration processes from a sensemaking perspective. The author identifies three concurrent cultural sensemaking processes involved in the construction of cultural differences: 1) a search for rational understanding of cultural differences; 2) emotional identification: concern about the other side can result in cultural alienation or attachment; 3) social-political manipulation for legitimate purposes.

Vaara's (2000) work considers the influence of individual factors on the processes of cultural sensemaking, including individuals' understanding and emotional experiences of cultural differences, and social and political factors. However, the focus of her study is on understanding the issues and problems occurring in processes of organisational change such as mergers, and the scope of the research

is at the organisational level. Dao (2012) argues that the influence of the individual on social interaction is far more complex than that proposed in Vaara's (2000) model. He further points out that this kind of approach overlooks the processes of individuals' sharing knowledge, and learning among individual actors driving the ongoing construction of sensemaking.

In a departure from the above model, Dao's (2011) doctoral work explores the dynamics of culture through interaction processes in five Danish-Vietnamese joint ventures by taking the role of individuals, and contextual and process elements into consideration. His work identifies three major types of interaction involved in cultural construction in international joint venture settings. These are competence building, decision making, and socializing, which is consistent with the three major processes of learning, power bargaining, and relationship building. His work provides a comprehensive picture for readers to understand the processes of individuals' intercultural interaction in specific joint ventures. It also stresses the influence of individual actors on shaping interaction processes. Based on the degree of contextual awareness and the attitude toward a common joint venture of an individual sensemaker, the author identifies three categories: the stereotyper, who uses stereotypes to explain and make sense of a given issue, the constructive sensemaker, who approaches issues in a constructive manner with a strong contextual awareness, and the insider sensemaker, who cares more about situations and the actively involved members than about the macro context.

Dao's study emphasizes individual agency in making sense of cultural differences, and how this process involves learning, power bargaining, and relationship building at the organisational level. As such, it offers an inspiration for the current study. In other words, sensemaking is an ideal response when people encounter an unexpected event; through it, people improve their competence, build relationships with cultural others, and attain a balance of power. However, the focus of Dao's work is on intercultural interaction at the organisational level. For example, in articulating the process of competence building, Dao is concerned about how organisations provide training courses to equip members with relevant knowledge. In terms of the three categories of individual sensemakers, he does not

further explore the reasons why their responses to cultural differences are different from person to person. In addition, Dao's work fails to address what happens when people maintain their usual ways of interacting with cultural others, and which factors might hamper the process of sensemaking. These limitations are exactly what I intend to explore in this study, as exploring underlying hindrances is helpful for both the organisation and its members to realise the issues in intercultural encounters and thereby find solutions.

Methodologically, the participants involved in the above two studies are middle and top leaders in international joint ventures and thus they tend to pay more attention to the dynamics of culture in the organisational layer, such as the processes of decision making or power bargaining in facing organisational issues. In daily intercultural communication, the process of power bargaining might be not as apparent as the processes of learning and relationship building, especially to HCS. In short, the focus of Vaara and Dao's work is on how the participants make sense of organisational events rather than their daily intercultural communication experiences with cultural others, which is the focus of my study.

Beyond sensemaking at the organisational level, a further strand of research has focused on sensemaking processes at the individual level (e.g. Bird & Osland, 2005-2006; Osland & Bird, 2000). For instance, Osland and Bird (2000; see also Bird & Osland, 2005-2006 for an extension) propose a cultural sensemaking model as an extension of Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory in intercultural settings. This model (see Figure 2.2) is composed of an iterative cycle of sequential events that is undergirded by constellations of cultural values and cultural history: 1) Framing the situation, 2) making attributions, and 3) selecting script.

In the first stage (framing the situation), an individual identifies a context and then notices cues which provide conscious information about the situation, and forms individual expectations of the situation. In other words, individuals frame the situation using the cues noticed and the expectations these cues engender. Next, in the stage of making attributions, the cues are analyzed in order to match the context with appropriate schemata. This matching process is moderated or

influenced by the person's social identity (e.g. ethnic or religious background, gender, social class and organisational affiliation) and the person's history (e.g. experiences and chronology). Attributions about the "other" are also influenced by the person's attitudes and beliefs about the other's identity: their ethnicity, religion, social class, etc. Thus, the first two stages deal with how people attempt to interpret cultural differences.

The third stage, selecting a script, involves choosing an appropriate schema or cultural script. The script a person selects is chosen from a repertoire developed through individual past experiences, and is influenced by individual ability to draw similarities between this situation and past experiences. Osland and Bird explain that the reason why a person chooses this script in this situation rather than others reflects an underlying hierarchy of cultural values. There are a constellation of values, such as individualism/collectivism, embedded in schemata and which one trumps depends on the specific situation. In this way, the authors provide a possible explanation for cultural paradoxes. Thus, the third stage is concerned with how people react to cultural difference in intercultural encounters on the basis of their perceptions.
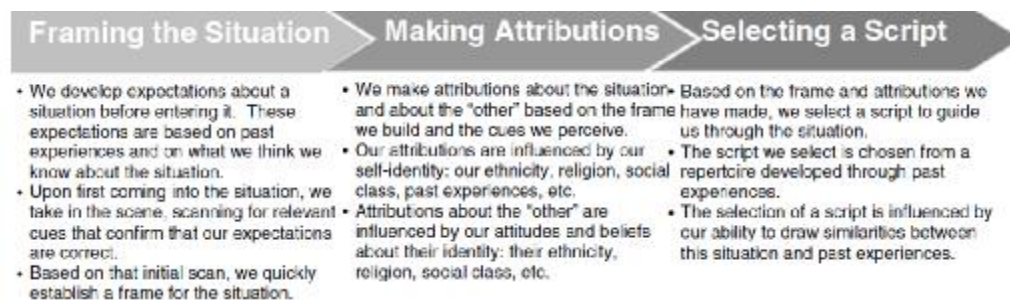
Figure 2.2 Cultural Sensemaking Model (Bird & Osland, 2005-2006, p. 125)

This model activates Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory. According to Weick and his colleagues (2005), identity construction and plausibility are the two basic properties which make sensemaking different from basic cognitive psychology. The first two stages of the cultural sensemaking model explain why a person's interpretation may be plausible rather than accurate: because it involves personal experience and subjective attitudes. "Because we all have a unique background

and set of experiences, meaning is relative and therefore sense making is relative. The same behaviour can be given different meanings by different people, and sometimes we may attribute a wrong meaning to the behaviour we have observed" (Mughan & O'Shea, 2010, p. 113). In addition, identity construction is manifested through the actors' interpretation and reactions. The actors respond to the other's unexpected behaviour based on their plausible interpretation, and in doing this they construct their identities.

In intercultural encounters, Vaara (2000) contends that the actor's identity is most likely to be constructed by distinguishing him/herself from another group by noting and emphasizing the cultural differences that appear important. Concerning this point, Tajfel and John Turner's (1979) social identity theory provides a useful starting point for understanding this process of identity construction and possible bias in the course of intercultural interpretation. This theory makes two assumptions: that an individual differentiates self and others in their social interactions (through social categorization and social comparison); and that an individual always seeks to enhance his or her self-image (Tajfel, 1981). Both social categorization and social comparison are also central concepts of social identity theory, which offers a psychological explanation for ethnocentrism, in-group favouritism, intergroup discrimination and out-group derogation.

Social categorization, in Ting-Toomey's (1999, p. 149) words, is a "fundamental quality of cognition" which "offers a way to manage our chaotic environment in a predictable and efficient fashion" on the basis of the distinction between "us" (in-group) and "them" (out-group). People categorize others (including themselves) in order to understand and identify them (themselves). The consequences of this process frame our certain expectation states of how others should or should not behave in a certain way. Furthermore, once people have categorized and identified themselves as part of a group, they then tend to compare that group with other groups. However, in making such a comparison, social identity theory posits that people tend to favourably evaluate the in-group and negatively evaluate the out-group in order to maintain or achieve their self-image (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Accordingly, people tend to exaggerate the differences between membership categories and minimize the differences within each of these categories (Ting-Toomey, 1999). As a result, Guo (2007) concludes that individuals' perceptions about out-groups or their members could be superficial and biased in intergroup interaction. For example, members of an out-group tend to be seen as similar to each other and have what are perceived as salient common characteristics of the group, which could be both lacking in depth and even distorted. This characteristic of social categorization also offers an explanation for stereotyping in intergroup encounters. Stereotyping refers to "an exaggerated set of expectations and beliefs about the attributes of a group membership category" (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 161), while generalizing signifies "making general assumptions about other groups" (Glaser, et al., 2007, p. 31). Thus, a stereotype is an overgeneralization. In intercultural encounters, there is a large potential for misunderstanding brought about by gaps between the expected and the experienced (Bird & Osland, 2005-2006).

In addition to identity construction and plausibility, Osland and Bird's cultural sensemaking model does not deny the function of the bipolar models of national cultural values and communication styles, which they label sophisticated stereotyping (Osland & Bird, 2000). The co-authors acknowledge that these cultural stereotypes are useful in understanding people's behaviour but know their limitations in understanding wide variations of behaviour in interpersonal communication. They further point out that cultural stereotypes are used to interpret cultural others' behaviour when the actors are not familiar with each other, but are gradually replaced by refined understanding. They suggest that in intercultural encounters attention should be paid to individuals' personality, since cross-cultural collaboration efforts only ask people to work with a few people rather than with an entire culture (Bird & Osland, 2005-2006). In other words, in constructing cultural differences, the interlocutor's personality may play a similar role to the culture in which the person is socialized. Thus, attributions about others "must take into consideration more information than what culture they belong to" (Bird & Osland, 2005-2006, p. 128).

This approach towards interpretations of cultural differences resonates with some scholars of diversity studies and is evidenced by some empirical studies. For example, these researchers have noticed that in the workplace individuals make sense of cultural differences in multiple ways. For instance, in a qualitative investigation about how members socially construct differences in international settings, Behhoste and Monin (2013) identify that cultural differences are interpreted from three perspectives: national distance (nationality), social status (position in the company), and functional distinction (role in the company). The focus of attention is on values (moral, or intellectual position on a specific topic), attitudes and behaviours, and knowledge and expertise. The common feature of this kind of social constructionist research is to attempt to move away from the assumption that national cultural differences are necessarily more salient and relevant than other kinds of differences. Instead, the focus is on individual encounters and the process of discovery of differences in international settings (Belhoste & Monin, 2013). This is exactly what I attempt to do in the current research.

Accordingly, compared with Vaara's (2000) and Dao's (2011) work, Bird and Osland's (2005-2006) model focuses more on the roles of individuals in the processes of sensemaking. It emphasizes that the actor's ability and the interlocutors' personality are also important in sensemaking, in association with cultural values and communication styles. In addition, it also stresses the interplay between interpretation and action: the first two stages of their model are about interpretation, while the third one is about reaction. In doing this, people socially construct their reality of the world. As such, Osland and Bird's cultural sensemaking model provides an analytic framework for understanding how my participants socially construct their reality at UNNC.

However, like Dao's (2011) work, Osland and Bird's (2005-2006; 2000) model also does not address the influence of emotion in the process of sensemaking. In effect, responses to cultural differences could be different if the others' unexpected behaviour invokes positive or negative emotions. In this regard, Storti (1990) identifies a process to explain what is likely to occur when people

encounter unexpected behaviour from cultural others. It starts with the expectation that others will behave like us and the discovery that they do not. Therefore, a cultural incident occurs, which provokes an emotional reaction such as fear or anger. At this point, people either withdraw from the other culture to keep their normal ways of dealing with the cultural other's unexpected behaviour, or make an effort to put aside their emotional reaction and think about the incident cognitively – "What's going on here?" In so doing, they become aware of their emotional reaction and look for its cause. Thus, cultural sensemaking is triggered. This model highlights the importance of emotional reactions in an intercultural encounter.

Nevertheless, Storti (1990) does not go further to discuss the case of people withdrawing from a cultural response. In response to Storti's (1990) model, Osland, Bird and Gundersen (2007) identify how people react to these unexpected events in an intercultural encounter. They contend that there are three types of reactions: fight-flight, acceptance, or cultural sensemaking. The former two are negative responses while the latter one is a positive response to the unexpected events.

The concept of fight-flight response is a physiological term which is used to describe the human reaction to intense threats and stress by either fighting or fleeing danger in order to survive (Cannon, 1932). The authors borrow this concept to describe two types of negative responses to an unexpected event in the intercultural context. The fight response "takes the form of imposing one's own meaning on the situation and refusing to consider another perspective", while the flight response refers to "a withdrawal from the other culture – isolating oneself from contact" (Osland, et al., 2007, p. 22). The latter also tends to be accompanied by misattributions about the other culture or negative judgments towards cultural differences. The fight-or-flight responses represent an ethnocentric point of view towards cultural differences. The acceptance response implies passive adaptation to the expectations of another culture, neither rejecting nor attempting to understand cultural differences. The third response, cultural sensemaking, is perceived as the most transformational and positive reaction to an unexpected

event, and can have numerous cognitive, emotional, and behavioural consequences, as it seeks cultural understanding (Osland, et al., 2007).

Nevertheless, Osland, Bird and Gundersen's (2007) classifications of the ways in which people respond to cultural differences is based on literature and pilot interviews with intercultural experts who had rich intercultural experiences and understanding, but many more empirical investigations are needed. Moreover, they do not explore the factors causing the responses of fight-flight and acceptance.

Lastly, Osland and Bird's cultural sensemaking model does not further explore the kinds of ability people need in the processes of sensemaking, and the kinds of personality that might facilitate or hamper the actor's sensemaking. In addition, this cultural sensemaking model appears to overlook the role of communication in the processes of sensemaking.

In summary, Bird and Osland's (2005-2006; 2000) cultural sensemaking model, as an analytical framework, provides a useful heuristic for understanding and responding to cultural differences between organisational members, despite its limitations. In association with the above-mentioned studies, the framework offers more detailed insights which shed light on the current study in various ways.

So far, I have identified Bird and Osland's (2005-2006; 2000) cultural sensemaking model as the analytical framework for this study. Furthermore, I discussed the possible influence of social context, power and Chinese cultural values on Chinese communicative behaviour in intercultural encounters in section 2.2. Next, I discuss individual factors which might influence the process of sensemaking.

2.4 The influence of individual factors on sensemaking

Bird and Osland's (2005-2006; 2000) cultural sensemaking model highlights the importance of personality and individual ability in the process of sensemaking, but fails to explore these aspects in detail. Therefore, this section looks at what is known about these two issues in the literature.

2.4.1 Personality

In intercultural interaction, cultural differences are usually made apparent by the cultural other's communication and behaviour, which is related to attitudes and cultural values (Varner & Beamer, 2011). Personality refers to "the part of a person that makes them behave in a particular way in social situations" (Macmillan online dictionary). Research on personality psychology is also dominated by essentialists (Burr, 2003). They believe that human beings have a unique set of personality traits which can be broken into components, as they have done with culture.

Under this assumption, personality researchers make efforts to find universal traits in human beings. Many western researchers in personality psychology suggest that human personality can be grouped into five broad domains or dimensions. This was eventually labelled the "Big Five" model (or FFM) (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005; Costa & McCrae, 1985, 1987, 1997; cited inDi Blas & Forzi, 1998; McCrae & Costa, 1997). The Big Five domains are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. Meanwhile, the five personality traits each fall on a continuum and each dimension is associated with an opposite character, and can be summarised as follows (Hilgard et al., 2000, p. 437):

- **Openness to experience**: (*inventive/curious* vs. *consistent/cautious*). Openness reflects the extent to which a person is imaginative or independent, and depicts a personal preference for a variety of activities over a strict routine.

- **Conscientiousness**: (*efficient/organised* vs. *easy-going/careless*). A tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, and aim for achievement; planned rather than spontaneous behaviour; organised, and dependable.

- **Extraversion**: (*outgoing/energetic* vs. *solitary/reserved*). Energy, positive emotions, surgency, assertiveness, sociability and the tendency to seek stimulation in the company of others, and talkativeness.

- **Agreeableness**: (*friendly/compassionate* vs. *cold/unkind*). A tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others.

- **Neuroticism**: (*sensitive/nervous* vs. *secure/confident*). The tendency to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anger, anxiety, depression, or vulnerability. Neuroticism also refers to the degree of emotional stability and impulse control.

In the past two decades, there has been a growing consensus that FFM can be used to broadly describe the higher-order structure of the adult personality (Caspi, et al., 2005). Based on a survey of 7134 people from different countries, McCrae and Costa (1997) find five similar personality structures in German, Portuguese, Hebrew, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese participants. Hence, they further conclude that the personality trait structure is universal, in that the samples studied represent highly diverse cultures with languages from five distinct language families.

Nevertheless, some personality researchers challenge this point of view and contend that human personality is influenced by culture and thus personality traits are different from culture to culture. For example, Wang, Cui and Zhou (2005) list a number of separate studies (from Japan, the Philippines and China – including Hong Kong and Taiwan – and Korea) that find that the "Open to experience" factor (O factor) in FFM is not confirmed in their participants. These studies further point out that the O factor rarely exists in eastern cultures. This claim is also demonstrated by their own empirical investigation (Wang, et al., 2005). In the context of China, Yang and Wang (1999) establish a Chinese personality structure (the Big Seven), which was later confirmed by Wand and Cui (2003). Just like FFM, each dimension of the Big Seven structure also includes subdimensions (Yang & Wang, 1999). More specifically, these are:

- Extraversion – active, gregarious, and optimistic

- Kindness – altruistic, honest and affectionate

- Behaviour styles – rigorous, self-constrained and composed

- Talents – Decisive, persistent and alert and resourceful

- Emotionality – patient and candid

- Human relations – generous and warm

- Ways of life – assertiveness and not seeking fame and wealth

In a comparative investigation about the responses of 2671 Chinese college students to FFM and the Big Seven inventory, Wang and his colleagues (2005) demonstrate that the Big Seven model of Chinese personality is stable, while the Big Five personality structure is not found.

However, the two above-mentioned models also attempt to essentialise human personality traits into limited dimensions, either as universal ones (e.g. FFM), or nation-based (e.g. the Big Seven). These models do not account for the diversity of ethnicity, culture, religion, history, regional differences, etc. implicit in any individual's experience. From a social constructionist view, one's personality is not internal and fixed but is constructed in relation to others (Stead, 2004). However, this does not mean that the above-mentioned essentialist personality theories are of no use. Rather, these theories could be used to explain human behaviour in social interactions with others (Burr, 2003) as national cultural values. Accordingly, research on personality traits possibly offers a useful heuristic for understanding HCS's making sense of their non-Chinese expatriate counterparts.

2.4.2 Intercultural competence

Communication is central to organisational sensemaking. It "involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action" (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 409). Therefore, competence in communication is important in the process of sensemaking. Similarly, intercultural competence in intercultural communication is important to cultural sensemaking in intercultural contexts. Intercultural competence refers to "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientations to the world" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 7). It can be seen from the definition of intercultural competence that obtaining intercultural competence is the target of cultural sensemaking, so cultural sensemaking provides an approach to develop intercultural competence. This subsection thus

attempts to illustrate the components which constitute intercultural competence and their possible influence on cultural sensemaking.

In the field of intercultural communication, several categories of models of intercultural competence have been developed (as summarized by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009)). However, I select a transformational model for my study because, despite having been developed for professional mobility (Glaser, et al., 2007), the model depicts intercultural communication in intercultural workplaces. This model (see Figure 2.3 below) lists seven components of intercultural competence people are expected to have in order to interact effectively in intercultural professional contexts when encountering cultural differences. The development of these components involves learning or unlearning certain knowledge and values and entails attitudinal and behavioural change.
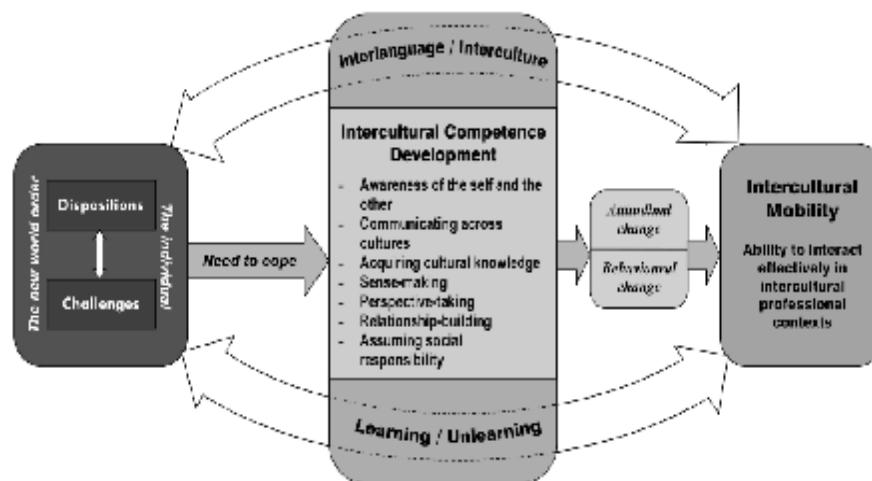
Figure 2.3 The Development of Intercultural Competence: A Transformational Model (Glaser, et al., 2007, p. 17)

These seven components are awareness of the self and the other, communicating across cultures or inter-cultures, acquiring cultural knowledge (similar to the knowledge (*savoir)* in Byram's (1997) model), sense-making, perspective-taking, relationship building, and social responsibility. More specifically, awareness of the self and the other refers "to getting to know oneself, reflecting upon one's culture-bound upbringing and standpoint and analysing in depth one's norms,

values, beliefs and behaviours", which is perceived as "a starting point towards accepting, understanding and enjoying otherness" (Glaser, et al., 2007, p. 30). Cultural sensemaking is triggered by an unexpected event brought about by culturally different people. In interpreting culturally different behaviour, one is aware of the self and the other. From a personal perspective, the awareness of self means that "one's perspective is rooted and therefore limited", and knowing the self acts as a starting point to accept, understand, and enjoy otherness (Glaser, et al., 2007, p. 27). From the perspective of the other, finding out about the other calls for showing interest, curiosity and perseverance to truly understand the other, which is the foundation for the intercultural encounter (Glaser, et al., 2007).

Communicating across culture consists of non-verbal communication, verbal communication and language awareness. In the process of cultural sensemaking, the actor makes full use of the resource of language to make sense of the unknown. Thus, the competence of verbal communication is essential. In addition, the appropriate use of non-verbal communication such as eye contact and body language is also helpful for others to understand what people want to express. Furthermore, language awareness refers to "the awareness of how speaking one or more languages or a particular language such as English is related to social/professional status" (Glaser, et al., 2007, p. 33). In multicultural contexts, people's native language (e.g. Chinese) may influence the manner in which they learn another language (e.g. English) and the degree of competence they attain. The native or proficient speaker of the selected language may also convey power over non-native speakers of this language (Glaser, et al., 2007).

As for acquisition of cultural knowledge, it includes the acquisition of culture-general knowledge (possessing knowledge of the world) and culture-specific knowledge (possessing some culture-specific knowledge of the interlocutor) (Glaser, et al., 2007). Culture-general knowledge here is equivalent to *savoir* (knowledge) in Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence: knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction (p. 51). Rasmussen, Sieck, and Osland (2011) state that

culture-specific knowledge refers to that which enables a person to explain successfully and predict the behaviour of culturally different people in specific situations and enables the person to make sense of cultural behaviours that appear to be paradoxical. The latter is exactly what is needed in the process of cultural sensemaking. As stated previously, cultural sensemaking involves both the actor's interpretation of an unexpected event and his/her subsequent reaction, and through it his/her cultural knowledge can be updated and skills can be practised.

Perspective taking is defined as the capacity to look at reality from different viewpoints. It involves at least five qualities: empathy, flexibility, decentering, open-mindedness and coping with ambiguity (Glaser, et al., 2007). Sensemaking, as a component of intercultural competence, is included in this model. It involves *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), and *savoir apprendre/ faire* (skills of discovering and interaction) in Byram's (1997) model (Glaser, et al., 2007). In addition, it entails "identifying/perceiving and understanding prevalent values, beliefs and norms in a situation" (Glaser, et al., 2007, p. 35).

Although the model regards relationship building and social responsibility as the components of intercultural competence, these two concepts somehow are not discussed. Therefore, I plan to look at these in my study. Relationship building in the process of sensemaking is identified in Dao's (2011) empirical research. It is possible to establish relationships in interpersonal interaction, especially in the Chinese context in which interpersonal relationships play a large role in social life. In addition, cultural sensemaking is triggered by individual awareness of the self and the other, and requires the sensemaker to make sense of the differences from the other's perspective by recognising the cultural knowledge the actor holds and then reacting by using his or her communicative skills. In doing so, the relationship between the actor and the other may be established. However, the extent to which the relationship is established is subject to many factors, which I plan to explore in the current research.

To conclude, in this subsection I have explored the components of intercultural competence that could affect the process of cultural sensemaking by drawing on Glaser et al.'s (2007) model. In addition to this, the model connects sensemaking

with intercultural competence, although the authors appear to put more weight on the skill capability entailed in sensemaking and ignore other components involved, such as knowledge and attitudes. However, the above model does not reveal the relationships between sensemaking and other components of intercultural competence. Moreover, in the field of intercultural communication, this model serves mainly as a training tool to enable students or employees to improve intercultural competence (e.g. Mughan & O'Shea, 2010; Rasmussen, et al., 2011). Therefore, it is worth exploring how these components impact the process of cultural sensemaking and conversely how cultural sensemaking facilitates individuals' development of intercultural competence in a real multicultural workplace.

So far, I have discussed social constructionism as the theoretical framework, cultural sensemaking as the analytical framework, and potential factors which could influence this process. Next, I turn to briefly look at some empirical studies of intercultural communication in organisations in China.

2.5 Some empirical research relevant to the study

Having reviewed the literature, this section briefly discusses some empirical studies relevant to the current study in the fields of cross-culture management and intercultural communication. Studies in the field of cross-cultural management in China mainly use the framework of national culture, within which there are two main themes: one focuses on the adjustment and performance of expatriates in Chinese culture and the other attempts to examine the effects of Chinese culture on Chinese communication in multinational management settings (Liu & Dong, 2010).

Pertaining to the first strand, most research is conducted using the frameworks of Hofstede's (2005) cultural values and Hall's (1976) high-low context communication. Among these dimensions, Chinese collectivism, higher power distance, concern for interpersonal *guan xi*, and high context communication styles can exert a key influence on the adjustment and performance of expatriates in China. For example, through a single case study of "Email Gate" in China,

Zhang and Huang (2013) analyse why a serious conflict occurred between a foreign supervisor and a Chinese subordinate in a Chinese foreign-invested enterprise. They clarify that the conflict derived from differences in individualism/collectivism and high/low context communication between the two parties. The study indicates that some Chinese cultural values still play a role in the Chinese but ignores the individual agency in intercultural interaction.

Nevertheless, transitions in Chinese values, especially among the younger generation, are also evidenced in some empirical studies. For example, in exploring how the expatriate managers in the Suzhou Industrial Park, south of Shanghai, adjust to the Chinese cultural environment, Goodall, Li, and Warner (2006) show that the younger Chinese generation appears to have individualistic tendencies and be sensitive to the fairness of the companies, while they also retain some values such as high power distance and concern for interpersonal *guan xi,* from the perspective of the expatriates. Although Goodall et al.'s study challenges Chinese collectivism, it still employs the framework of cultural values and lacks consideration of individual factors in intercultural communication.

Among the latter strand, some studies focus on the influence of Chinese traditional culture on Chinese communication, while other studies examine how Chinese cultural differences affect Chinese behaviour in multicultural settings. For example, Jiang (2009) explores the impact of cultural differences on communication in the context of Sino-US companies from the perspective of Hofstede and Hall's dimensions and the different roots of Chinese and American culture. This study suggests that group members should be aware of cultural differences, recognize and respect cultural differences, use different perspectives, and enhance adaptability and flexibility to achieve effective communication in the course of group work. Similarly, Chen (2006) conducts her qualitative research in a Sino-German self-organised project team, aiming to explore the impact of cultural differences on the communication of individuals. Her research shows that there exist differences between Chinese and Germans from the perspectives of attitudes towards leaders' decisions, approaches to task, conflicts in daily working processes and conflict resolution. However, these empirical studies stress the

influence of national cultural differences on Chinese intercultural communication and downplay other factors such as individual agency and the context in which intercultural communication occurs. Therefore, these studies are unable to overcome the limitations which I have discussed in section 2.2.2.

In terms of the research setting and research field, Dong's (2010) work is most similar to the present study. His research explores cross-cultural communication management applied in joint Chinese-foreign programmes in universities. It focuses on how to use effective communication strategies in the programme studied to deal with cultural conflict and thereby achieve good reactions and results. However, the focus of his research is on the strategies of the Chinese participants in intercultural encounters at the organisational level. It fails to seek the reasons why these participants adopted these strategies, and what the role of individual agency is in intercultural communication. Furthermore, the above-mentioned studies treat culture as static and context-free, and thus ignore its dynamic and contextual features, which contrast with social constructionist perspectives.

Wang (2010b) focuses on international contact among students at Fudan University from the perspective of host Chinese students, and is the most relevant to the present research in terms of research content and methodology so far. Wang's research, drawing on in-depth interviews, concerns the host Chinese students' perceptions of culture and cultural differences, their attitude towards intercultural contact on campus, and finally, their actual responses to these cultural differences. Her research finds that the Chinese students construct their cultural differences with foreign students in terms of two aspects, lifestyle and mentality. Their motivation for intercultural communication included curiosity and instrumental motivation, such as improving language competence and broadening academic horizons. In facing communication difficulties, these Chinese students also adopt diverse strategies to cope, which are summarized in table 2.1 below. Therefore, Wang's work is methodologically similar to my study. It indicates that the perception of cultural differences is different from person to person, depending on the perceiver's individual factors such as experience and social status.

Nevertheless, compared with students, communication between staff might be different in terms of the purposes, the mentality of students and mature staff might differ, and the extent of their intercultural experience and contact is also likely to be different.

Table 2.1 Examples of Coping Strategies Identified by Host Chinese Students

Barriers	Coping Strategy
Unable to understand each other due to language incompetence	Writing down the words; Re-explain in plain language; Seek help from a third person
Cultural Misunderstanding	Explain the situational or social norms underneath certain practice that may seem unacceptable to IS
IS appearing uninterested and distant	Positive Interpretation highlighting IS' particular cultural identity
IS having hobbies that are unacceptable to HCS	Respect difference and emphasize common interest

*IS: international students

In summary, this brief review of intercultural studies in China highlights a lack of empirical studies, also noted by Hu (2010) and Hu and Fan (2011). Furthermore, I have been unable to identify any studies that specifically focus on HCS's intercultural communication in the context of Sino-foreign joint university programmes. Accordingly, the current study aims to respond to the urgent need for such empirical research.

2.6 Conclusions and formulation of research questions

Grounded in a social constructionist perspective in association with Chinese philosophy, I have illustrated in this chapter the necessity for the current study. The section first presents conclusions about the extant literature relevant to the current study and gaps in current understanding. After that, I put forward the research questions for this study.

Intercultural studies have been dominated by positivist paradigms for a long time.

Among these paradigms, Hall's (1976) high-low context culture and Hosftede's (1980, 1991) value dimensions have been widely applied. So far, the majority of intercultural studies, especially in organisational contexts, have been done using these frameworks. These studies provide a general understanding about the influence of Chinese values on intercultural communication styles, e.g. Ting-Toomey (1999), Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998), and so forth. The concepts that emerge from these models, and in particular those pertaining to Chinese (intercultural) communication are helpful in partly understanding HCS's behaviour in intercultural encounters. However, these approaches have also received increasing criticism in the face of the advancement of globalization and increasing human mobility. The main limitations of these positivist studies are the lack of recognition given to important concepts such as context, power and individual agency, and thus complex cultural phenomena are reduced to a shorthand description, labelled essentialism.

In order to overcome the limitations of positivist intercultural research, a research stream named social constructionism emerged in the 1980s (Piller, 2011). Instead of the essentialists' treatment of culture as stable and static, social constructionists see culture as dynamic, changeable and constructed in interpersonal interaction. Therefore, in undertaking social constructionist research, attention has been paid to the interaction between people, power, relationships, and context in the process of constructing knowledge. In line with this stream, Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory has received increasing attention in intercultural studies. It offers an analytical framework to understand organisational issues such as crisis, merger and change at both organisational and individual levels. While my own study is not specifically focused on such momentous organisational shifts, it is concerned with the intercultural communication and behaviour accompanying similar and other aspects of organisational complexity, and thus, Weick's model provides a sound theoretical basis to guide my study.

At the organisational level, researchers (e.g. Clark & Soulsby, 2009; Dao, 2011; Vaara, 2000) have explored how cultural differences are socially constructed in the process of interpersonal interaction in multicultural organisations. Culture is

embedded in the processes of learning, power bargaining, and relationship building, which involve the social context and the emotion of the actor. The focus of these studies is on the construction of cultural differences. Their limitation is a downplaying of individuals' reactions in facing cultural differences. In that sense, Osland and Bird's (2005-2006; 2000) cultural sensemaking model fills the gap by focusing on a single sensemaking process. They explain how people interpret and react to an unexpected cultural event in the process of sensemaking, and how people deal with an unexpected event. Accordingly, the two strands of research complement each other and guide me to focus on the process of interpreting and reacting to cultural differences in HCS's interaction with their expatriate counterparts, in the context of China. However, the processes of individual interaction with cultural others are complex. Other research, e.g. Storti (1990) and Osland et al. (2007), indicates that cultural sensemaking does not necessarily take place when people encounter an unexpected cultural event. In other words, people might insist on their own methods of dealing with an unexpected cultural event. Thus, these studies demonstrate a need to explore the reasons behind these phenomena.

In addition, inspired by Bird and Osland's (2005-2006) suggestion, I have also briefly discussed two factors, personality traits and intercultural competence, and how they might influence the process of sensemaking. Furthermore, sensemaking, as an important component of intercultural competence, is included in Glaser, et al.'s (2007) transformational model for professional mobility. Nevertheless, they do not further explore the relationships between sensemaking and other components of intercultural competence. If cultural sensemaking is regarded as a positive response to cultural differences, my research interest is concerned with how the process of cultural sensemaking could facilitate the individual's development of intercultural competence, and second with the components of intercultural competence that are involved in the process. So far, extant literature related to the above issues cannot be found (at least, literature published in English and Chinese), and it is thus worth exploring them in my study.

Lastly, in the context of intercultural studies in China there is a lack of empirical

research. In particular, no research focuses on HCS's intercultural experiences in Sino-foreign joint universities.

Accordingly, inspired by extant literature and bearing its limitations in mind, my research focus emerges. I aim to explore HCS's intercultural experiences from a sensemaking perspective. Specifically, I seek to address the following research questions in this study:

RQ1: How do HCS perceive cultural differences in their daily communication with the expatriate staff at UNNC?

RQ2: How do HCS respond (in terms of their intercultural communication) to these differences at UNNC?

RQ3: What (intercultural) communication and behavioural factors can impede the process of (inter)cultural sensemaking from the perspective of HCS?

RQ4: How does (inter)cultural sensemaking facilitate the development of intercultural competence?

Question one attempts to explore how HCS make sense of the cultural other's (here the expatriates) culturally different behaviour in their intercultural encounters. From the perspective of sensemaking, people tend to seek plausible explanations for a subsequent reaction when facing an uncertain situation, using their frame of reference and past experiences. In question two, I aim to explore how HCS make sense of their own actions and communication in response to the other's culturally unexpected behaviour. Furthermore, I intend to identify the behavioural patterns of HCS's responses. Cultural sensemaking is regarded as a positive response to cultural differences (Osland, Bird, & Gundersen, 2007). If cultural sensemaking does not occur, then question three tries to address the factors hindering the process of sensemaking. If it occurs, I will explore how sensemaking facilitates the development of intercultural communicative competence in question four.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have provided important background for the current study. In the first section, I identified my research position as taking the perspective of social constructionism, in association with some key concepts derived from traditional Chinese philosophy. Social constructionists believe that knowledge is socially constructed in the course of interpersonal interaction through language. Under this epistemology, the focus of research transfers from the nature of the phenomenon to the relationships, the process and their meaning-making in interaction. This epistemology partly overlaps with the principles of traditional Chinese philosophy such as relationality. In addition, harmony, *guan xi*, *mian zi*, and power are key concepts in Chinese communication. All these constitute the backdrop for the current study.

Nevertheless, the mainstream approaches to intercultural studies are still dominated by positivist research so far and I thus reviewed some influential studies relevant to Chinese communication in section 2.2. From the essentialist points of view, Chinese are subsumed in a high context communication framework, e.g. mutual-face concern, indirect style, listener-oriented style, etc. (Ting-Toomey, 1999). In comparison with Americans, Chinese culture involves *han xu*, *ting hua*, *ke qi,* insider-outsider differentiation, and face-direction (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). These essentialist studies outline a general picture of Chinese people but fail to consider the complexity and diversity of individual Chinese, the context, and time. Therefore, this approach does not fit with the focus of my study.

Having located my social constructionist approach to intercultural communication, in association with my research interest, I chose cultural sensemaking, in association with other research mentioned previously, as an analytical framework for this study. In section 2.3, I illustrated the concept of Weick's (1995) sensemaking and its application in intercultural management. Specifically, the sensemaking theory can explain how culture is embedded in the process of

interpersonal interaction in the context of international joint ventures and international business collaboration. Researchers in the former strand seek to understand how conceptions of cultural differences are socially constructed in the process of sensemaking. Their work highlights the complexity of (intercultural) interactions and the importance of sensemaking to managers in multicultural organisations. In contrast, researchers in the latter strand focus on the micro process of cultural sensemaking, which is more closely related to my own study. Osland and Bird's (2005-2006; 2000) model offers a useful heuristic for understanding HCS-expatriate interactions in the multicultural UNNC, and how personal factors such as cultural backgrounds and personal experiences could influence individuals' actions and communication in intercultural encounters.

Nevertheless, these two strands of research are not without their limitations. First, both of them fail to address emotional influences on sensemaking. Negative emotions such as anger and fear might hamper the actor's willingness to engage in the processes of cultural sensemaking. I discussed the ways in which individuals respond to cultural differences by drawing on Osland et al.'s (2007) work: fight-flight, acceptance, and cultural sensemaking. These authors suggest that only cultural sensemaking is involved in cultural understanding of the other's behaviour and thus is a positive response to cultural differences. Nevertheless, further empirical research is required. Second, both strands downplay the role of communication in the processes of cultural sensemaking. Indeed, Mughan and O'Shea (2010) argue that the theory of sensemaking and intercultural communication overlap in some areas, such as the role of communication, generalization, ambiguity, and reflection, which influence individuals' actions. Third, although Bird and Osland (2005-2006) contend that individuals' abilities and personalities might affect the processes of cultural sensemaking, they do not further explore how these individual factors work in the process of sensemaking.

Accordingly, in section 2.4, I discussed individual factors (personality and intercultural competence) which might influence the process of intercultural interaction. In intercultural interaction, cultural differences are most likely to be manifested through individual personality. Thus, in section 2.4.1 I illustrated two

personality models (FFM and the big Seven). Nevertheless, from the social constructionist perspective, personality is not inherited but constructed in relation to others. Thus, I plan to examine personality traits that are more suitable for HCS's sensemaking. In addition, I explored the possible impact of intercultural competence on cultural sensemaking by drawing on Glaser et al.'s (2007) model.

Section 2.5 listed some empirical studies related to the current study, including the research area, subjects, and settings. Generally, research into intercultural studies in China lacks empirical studies and no studies focus on HCS's intercultural experiences at the individual level from the perspective of sensemaking.

Lastly, four research questions were put forward based on the above discussion.

Having reviewed the relevant literature and presented the research questions, in the next chapter I turn to the methodological approach used in this study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Given the theoretical and contextual background in the previous two chapters, this chapter details the methodological approach of this study. It comprises seven sections, each focusing on a distinct concern. The first section focuses on the choice of qualitative research strategy. Section 3.2 highlights the methods of data collection. Section 3.3 details the procedures of the fieldwork. Section 3.4 outlines the strategy and process of data analysis to facilitate understanding of the subsequent chapters on the research findings. In section 3.5 and 3.6, ethical issues and questions of validity and reliability respectively are considered. Lastly, in section 3.7 I discuss my own reflexivity in doing this research.

3.1 Qualitative research strategy

The importance of the social meaning of accounts and face-to-face interaction in a social constructionist enquiry has guided this study to adopt a qualitative research framework. Qualitative research uses an interpretive and naturalistic approach to make sense of the social world in natural settings. This kind of research focuses on the socially constructed nature of reality, the close relationship between the researcher and the researched, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Qualitative researchers seek to provide answers to questions based on created social experiences and the meanings people ascribe to these experiences. In terms of the current study, three factors lead to locating the study in a qualitative research framework.

First, the nature of the research questions points towards a qualitative approach. Cook, Meade, and Perry (2001) state that qualitative research questions "tend to inquire less about 'whether' or 'how much', but more about 'what', 'how', and 'why'"(p.469), which matches the four research questions formulated in this study:

RQ1: How do HCS perceive cultural differences in their daily communication with the expatriate staff at UNNC?

RQ2: How do HCS respond (in terms of their intercultural communication) to these differences at UNNC?

RQ3: What (intercultural) communication and behavioural factors can impede the process of (inter)cultural sensemaking from the perspective of HCS?

RQ4: How does (inter)cultural sensemaking facilitate the development of intercultural competence?

Second, the current study attempts to explore the lived experiences of HCS in a specific setting. Qualitative research enables the researcher to capture subjects' perspectives and embed the findings in lived experiences.

Last, the aim of this study is to understand how HCS experience intercultural interactions. According to Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam (2003), the aim of qualitative research is to "gain an understanding of the nature and form of phenomena, to unpack meanings, to develop explanations or to generate ideas, concepts and theories" (p.82). Therefore, for all these reasons, a qualitative approach is appropriate for the focus of this study.

3.2 Methods of data collection

The methods of data collection in qualitative research are various in order to achieve a deep understanding of the phenomenon under research. Thus, the original aim had been to employ interviews, observations and document analysis, but eventually interviews were adopted as the main method of data collection for several reasons. First, observation in qualitative research means to provide a direct method to record human behaviour and events as they occur—by watching, for qualitative researchers (Drew, Hardman, & Hosp, 2008). One of the advantages concerning this method of data collection is to provide information on the environment and behaviour of those who cannot, or do not, speak for themselves (Opie, 2004). Thus, it would have been helpful to observe how HCS communicated with expatriates in real situations, thereby obtaining first-hand data to complement understanding of the participants' own interpretations of their intercultural experiences. Nevertheless, this method was eventually discarded because it gave rise to some issues. On the one hand, if my research involved the

expatriates at UNNC, I was told that I had to get the permission from the Academic Committee of UNNC, which would take a long time and would most likely be rejected. Furthermore, as a formal organisation, UNNC would not allow an outsider to join their working events. On the other hand, it might create difficulty in recruiting participants since people tend to feel embarrassed when they know that their behaviour is being observed.

Documentary material was used to provide the background to this study: official documents deriving from the state (issued by the Chinese government at different levels) and private documents (the organisation: UNNC). The former provided a macro background for the current study. The latter provided information on the development of UNNC and issues encountered in the process of development. Furthermore, various sources of information relevant to UNNC from a variety of channels were consulted, such as journal articles about UNNC, its annual reports, mission statements, newsletters and online information from its websites. These materials provided rich information, enabling an understanding of the context in which the study was located, and thereby part of the participants' behaviour. Documentary material mainly offered background to both the internationalization of Chinese higher education and the research setting (UNNC), which has been provided in Chapter 1.

Interviewing was adopted as the main method of data collection. Interviews are the most widely employed method in qualitative inquiry (Bryman, 2012). The purpose of a qualitative interview is "to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1983, p. 174). An interview (an inter-view) is "an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data" (Kvale,1996; p. 14; cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 349). As such, knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and interpretation between the interviewer and interviewee, which is in line with a social constructionist perspective. In this study in-depth interviews were used with "an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9).

As such, the primary purpose of the interviews in this study is to enable the interviewees to reconstruct their intercultural experiences via their own language and stories. Furthermore, Rubin and Rubin (2012) refer to in-depth interviewing as responsive interviewing because this kind of interview asks researchers to respond to questions and then ask further questions about what they hear from the interviewees. It places an emphasis on "the importance of working with interviewees as partners rather than treating them as objects of research" (p. xv). It also emphasizes "searching for context and richness while accepting the complexity and ambiguity of life" (p. 38). This method is similar to Bryman's (2012) open-ended semi-structured interviews, which allow the researcher to have a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, but the interviewee still has the opportunity to choose how to reply and engage in topics interesting to her/him.

The core of responsive interviewing involves three kinds of question: main questions, probes, and follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The main questions deal with the overall research problem; probes are used to elicit details; and follow-up questions explore and test ideas emerging during the interviews. For instance, once the initial question or problem has been proposed, the researcher uses follow-up questions to explore what the interviewee has said so far in the interview; these questions are not formed from the interviewer's predetermined ideas. It is desirable that interviewees should have sufficient flexibility to describe their experiences as they wish and in their own way, while it is also the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the themes of discussion do not deviate far from the topics being researched.

Preparation of an interview guide

Having formulated the research questions and decided to adopt the responsive interview, An interview guide was then prepared to assist the interviewing process. The initial guide was constructed from existing empirical research, my personal perspective, and preliminary discussion with my supervisors. As Rapley (2004, p. 17; original italics) states, questions in an interview guide are "*initially* generated in negotiation with the relevant academic and non-academic literature, alongside your thoughts and hunches about what areas *might* be important to cover in the

interview". Regarding the current study, the main focus is on exploring how HCS interpret and respond to cultural differences in communicating with expatriates. Thus, the main questions should address HCS's perceptions of cultural differences and the strategies they adopt to deal with these differences. It was assumed that it would be comparatively easy to get answers about cultural differences by directly asking about differences between HCS and expatriates. However it might be less easy to get answers about their strategies regarding them. The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) (Chell, 1998) was therefore adopted for the interviews. CIT is defined as

> A qualitative interview procedure which facilitates the investigation of significant occurrences (events, incidents, processes or issues) identified by the respondent, the way they are managed, and the outcomes in terms of perceived effects. The objective is to gain an understanding of the incident from the perspective of the individual, taking into account cognitive, affective and behavioural elements. (Chell, 1998, p. 56; cited in Dao, 2011, p. 40)

Dao (2011) concludes that there are three advantages of CIT. First, adopting CIT enables the researcher to uncover processes in the form of a sequence of events or issues. Second, CIT is also helpful in eliciting the interviewee's frames of reference, feelings, attitudes and perspectives in the specific context. Third, CIT enables the researcher to identify contextual conditions which are most likely to affect the issues under investigation. Therefore, in order to probe the interviewees' strategies with regard to cultural differences, it was decided to ask the participants to give two examples of their understanding of an intercultural communication event or occasion with expatriates: one perceived as successful and the other perceived as unsuccessful or troubling.

Taking the above factors into consideration, an interview guide was prepared, consisting of eight main questions and it was employed in two pilot interviews in April 2011. The main questions sought answers to the four research questions, including perceptions of cultural differences, personal and environmental factors influencing intercultural communications, and the strategies the participants adopted in intercultural encounters. (See appendix 1 for details).

Interview language

There was a dilemma in choosing an interview language in this study. Theoretically, I could use either English, Mandarin Chinese, or mix the two languages to do the interviews. All of these had advantages and disadvantages. After making a comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of the three ways, I chose the second one (Mandarin Chinese) as my interview language for the following reasons.

Practically, English would have been the best choice as data-translation could be avoided and thus there would have been no trouble about code-switching at the data analysis and writing-up stages. While my participants communicated in English with their expatriate colleagues, I knew (from my previous experience of working there with them and from their different linguistic experiences in life and work) that their English proficiency varied. Coupled with this, my own experience and reading about linguistic issues in intercultural encounters made me worry about the extent to which my participants would be able to interpret, sophisticatedly and precisely, their understanding of their intercultural experiences, and how I, as researcher, would be able to grasp subtle meanings using a second language. Both of these aspects are essential to this study. From a social constructionist perspective, language is at the heart of individuals' constructions of their everyday reality (Burr, 2003). Obviously, no language could be better than Chinese for interpreting the reality of Chinese daily life in the context of China, as Chinese was the language used predominately among Chinese employees at UNNC. Therefore, I rejected the idea of using English as my interview language.

In contrast, there were several advantages to using Mandarin Chinese. First, the purpose of this study was to explore the participants' own experiences, including their perceptions, feelings and thoughts about intercultural communication, through their own words. Therefore, the quality of the study primarily depended on their verbal expression. I believed that the participants could express themselves better in their mother tongue, especially in the context of China and with a local Chinese researcher. Second, it could reduce the potential for the participants to answer the research questions in a superficial way because of their lack of appropriate words. Last, using Chinese helped me to establish trust and rapport with the participants, which will be discussed in section 3.3.3. I believed

that it would be more relaxed and comfortable for two native Chinese to talk in Mandarin Chinese in the context of China.

Nevertheless, the disadvantages of this choice involved issues relevant to translation, which will be dealt with in section 3.4.4. Consequently, I translated the English interview guide into Chinese (Appendix 2). I did not, however, translate the participant consent form (Appendix 3), bio-data form (Appendix 4), and information sheet (Appendix 5) presented to the participants prior to the interviews Chinese because I believed that the participants would not have difficulty in understanding their contents.

3.3 The fieldwork

Having explained the methods of data collection, I now describe the three stages of the field work. The first stage took place in July and August 2010 when the focus of the study was changed from expatriates to HCS (discussed in Chapter 1). The task of the second stage, during April 2011, was to pilot the proposed data collection method and instrument. In the third stage, the main data collection was conducted in October and November 2011. The latter two stages were important in the development of the study. Therefore, I elaborate on them in the following sequence: access to the field (3.3.1), the pilot study (3.3.2), establishing rapport and trust (3.3.3), sampling strategy (3.3.4), participant recruitment and profiles (3.3.5), and formal interview procedures (3.3.6).

3.3.1 Access to the field

Having established the research questions and methodological approach, gaining access to participants was crucial to the research. First of all, permission from UNNC was needed to facilitate the recruitment of participants. Given that I was very familiar with the overall environment, it was easy for me to know who the gatekeepers were. At the beginning of the second stage of the field work I contacted one key gatekeeper who was at a key decision-making level at UNNC. After listening to an explanation of the project he agreed to support it since my research would be meaningful and I had previously contributed to UNNC. Subsequently, he recommended two potential participants for the pilot study and

also went to the office of one of the two participants with me to show that he supported my project. His presence in this first meeting with one of the participants validated my study to the participants. His support also gave me confidence that doing this research was valuable and timely.

3.3.2 The pilot study

The pilot study was conducted in April 2011, after drafting the literature review and methodology chapter (including the initial version of the interview guide). I therefore already had knowledge of relevant theories and research skills. Two participants (one female and one male) accepted my invitation. The first interview lasted 120 minutes and the second 70 minutes. Subsequently, the data were transcribed verbatim. Analysis of the two interviews showed that the data could basically answer the research questions, and some themes had emerged through thematic analysis, albeit insufficiently. Therefore, the pilot study to some extent shed light on the main study and it was possible to trial and evaluate all my chosen research procedures. Furthermore, the pilot study also identified four key issues of concern for the main study.

First, the selection of participants is significant to the research. In the pilot study, I felt that one interview was less successful. Although I had prepared the interview guide, the interviewee tended to talk about other things rather than intercultural communication. As a result, some of the data were not relevant to my research although I spent almost twice as much time (120 minutes) on this interview compared with the other one (70 minutes). The probable reason might be that we were very familiar with each other and could share similar experiences. Therefore, the conversation was much more like chatter between old friends rather than a formal interview. As a result, a friend who checked the translation for me told me that she could not understand some sections of the conversation even in Chinese, let alone English, because the conversation omitted background information that the interviewee and I took for granted. Obviously, it was not ideal to interview someone too familiar and thus a better sampling strategy was needed for my main study. For example, I needed to approach potential participants through various channels, rather than just choosing acquaintances for the sake of convenience.

Second, the selection of the interview site is also important. Originally, I selected the coffee lounge located on the ground floor of the administrative block of the campus. However, the interview was frequently interrupted by the interviewee's colleagues entering the lounge and the interviewee saying hello to them. Moreover, the noise made by the coffee machine affected the quality of the recording. I told my second interviewee about my concern and changed the location of the interview to his office on his strong recommendation. However, we were at times interrupted by phone calls. Therefore, I decided to find a quiet place, e.g. a meeting room or staff lounge as my main interview site for the main data collection.

Third, I modified and refined the interview questions after the pilot study so that the questions in the guide focused exclusively on my research questions. As discussed in section 3.2.1, eight main questions had initially been used. After the pilot study, two main questions which probed into the participants' conflict and relationships with the expatriates were discarded since I found that those two themes could be explored more generally in their stories. In addition to this, I added one main question which asked about their perceptions of cultural differences. I also modified some questions and tried to avoid leading questions so as to make the questions easier to answer. Consequently, the main questions were reduced from eight in the pilot study to seven in the main study (see Appendix 6 in English and Appendix 7 in Chinese).

Last, useful experience was also gained from the data analysis. The data were transcribed verbatim and then translated into English shortly after the interviews. Initially, I tried to immerse myself in the translated version to search for the initial codes, but later found that I became lost in the English versions as my thinking was frequently interrupted by searching for the correspondence between the meaning in English and the original Chinese conversation. After listening to the interview audios many times, transcribing and reading the transcriptions, I became very familiar with the Chinese dialogues, associated with the Chinese context, and Chinese participants. It proved easier to pick out useful information in the original Chinese transcriptions. Eventually, I adopted the original Chinese version to search for the emergent themes.

Later, between the pilot study and the main data collection, I consulted a variety of literature on this issue, and found that it was a concern not only for me but also for many other international PhD students in the UK. For example, Robinson-Pant (2005) exemplifies many kinds of cross-cultural challenges, based on the real-life experiences of international students. In addition, the ways in which PhD students from a Chinese background at Durham University have treated these issues gave me inspiration. For instance, Chen (2009) explained how translation happened in the stage of writing-up in her thesis, and presented data in both Chinese and English on the grounds that there was no equivalent translation between the languages, and readers had the right to opt for the original language of the data along with the translated language. In terms of her approach to data presentation, Wang (2010a, p. 125) acknowledges that "focusing on the words the participants used and analysing the meanings they were attaching to them was one of the important analytical tools". Thus, she analysed her interview data in the original language (Chinese) and only the data presented in the data analysis was translated into English. She then put the original Chinese version of the parts of the data presented into the appendix for readers to examine, thereby allowing for possible alternative interpretations.

Compared with Wang (2010a), Yang's (2011) solution coincided with mine, which gave me confidence. She employed both English and Chinese in the process of coding her interview data. For example, she used the original Chinese words or phrases derived from the participants for coding, but refined and categorized them in English due to the fact that the majority of the literature was in English and the thesis was to be written in English. Like Chen (2009) and Wang (2010a), only the data presented in her thesis has been translated from Chinese. After discussion with my supervisor, I decided to employ Yang's (2011) method to analyse and present my data.

In summary, the pilot study played an important role in this study. It enabled me to orient myself in the research environment, hone my research skills, become familiar with the research process, and ensure that I had the correct focus for research.

3.3.3 Establishing rapport and trust

Social constructionists acknowledge the importance of an equal engagement between the researcher and researched and value their co-creation of a shared reality (Niekerk, 2005). Thus, establishing appropriate rapport and trust with the participants was crucial. Rapport means "getting along with each other, a harmony with, a conformity to, an affinity for one another", and too much and too little rapport is not appropriate (Seidman, 2006, p. 96). Trust is also important in this study because the degree to which the participants shared their personal experiences with me depends to a large extent on the degree to which they trust me. Therefore, I made efforts to establish rapport and trust with my participants but bore in mind the need to not become too close to them.

First, I gained the trust of the organisation through my contact with the UNNC gatekeeper, showing him the purposes and processes of the research. This guaranteed my study could to a large extent continue smoothly (see section 3.3.1). Second, I also tried to establish an appropriate rapport with my participants by showing respect in several ways. For example, I emailed my previous colleagues at UNNC before I went back to China and asked for their help. After I arrived in China, I made an appointment with them to introduce my project and ask for their help, again in person. In the course of interviewing, I tried to be empathetic and patient. Subsequently, after each interview, I sent a copy of the interview transcripts to each participant partly so she/he could check the content and partly to show respect. Academically, this process is called member-checking (Seidman, 2006). It includes the participants checking the content and findings of the interviews for the purpose of creating trust and establishing the credibility of the study. However, Seidman also lists other issues relevant to this point. She preferred to end the process of member-checking with the participants checking the accuracy of the interview transcript and that they were comfortable with it, but preserved the right to do her own research in the data analysis stage. It was eventually decided to adopt this suggestion.

In addition to establishing rapport with my participants, I also made efforts to build trust with them. Rubin and Rubin (2012) mention that both sharing a

common background with the participants and having someone vouch for the researcher are important ways to build trust, both of which were applied in the present study. First, I conducted a short informal chat at the outset of each interview by discussing (superficially) some shared topics. For instance, if the participant had had an experience of study overseas, then we were able to share our respective experiences. Second, I had to ask my colleagues at UNNC to recruit participants for me. This was because when I tried to contact five potential participants by myself with the permission of UNNC only one reluctantly accepted my invitation. Chinese people tend not to involve themselves in this kind of activity in order not to cause themselves unnecessary trouble. Using my colleagues as a method of introduction was a practical way to establish contact with subsequent participants.

3.3.4 Sampling strategy

The selection of participants for this study needed to meet at least two criteria: the participants were expected to have intercultural experiences at UNNC, and they had to be selected to "maximise the potential variation" (Ashwin, 2006, p. 654) in their experiences rather than provide a representative sample of HCS. With respect to the first criterion, it is natural since the main purpose of this study is to explore the participants' first-hand intercultural experiences. Thus, in the course of sampling, those who had had little contact with the expatriates were excluded to ensure that the subjects selected had had rich intercultural experiences which they would be able to draw on in the course of an interview. For instance, some positions, such as PE teachers and student tutors, were deliberately omitted since they mainly dealt with the students rather than with expatriates.

As for the second point, the aim was to "allow the widest possibility for readers of the study to connect to what they are reading" (Seidman, 2006, p. 52). As a result, job position and prior intercultural experience were the two priority factors in selecting participants. Additionally, care was taken to collect data from both male and female HCS and in a variety of age brackets in order to "maximise the potential variation" (Ashwin, 2006, p. 654). Consequently, a combination of snowball and purposive sampling strategies was adopted to collect data for this

study.

Given that I had participated in the establishment of UNNC, as mentioned in Chapter One, I am acquainted with some HCS there. Furthermore, I am very familiar with the overall environment, owing to my involvement with UNNC over several years. Therefore, at the beginning of the data collection, I intended to ask one of my previous colleagues to recruit potential participants for me according to the above requirements. In addition to this, I also tried to ask my participants to recruit participants. Lastly, I asked UNNC to introduce some potential participants according to my requirements.

3.3.5 Participant recruitment and profiles

Following the above approaches, 22 HCS were initially invited to take part in the study but two of them withdrew (one honestly told me that he had little intercultural experience at UNNC, and the other told me that she did not want to be involved after I had introduced the study). Two of my previous colleagues helped me recruit eleven participants, including themselves, and I invited six acquaintances. One participant was introduced by another participant. The other two were introduced by UNNC.

Consequently, together with the two participants involved in the pilot study and the twenty participants recruited for the main data collection, the total number of interviewees in this study was 22 (see Appendix 8 for the schedule of interviews). The average duration of the interviews was 69 minutes. 82% of the interviewees had a Master or doctoral degree. Among them, 73% held overseas degrees. They were distributed across the majority of the administrative departments, and their positions ranged from assistant to directors. Their average age was approximately 31, coincidently the same as the overall average for HCS at UNNC according to data for May 2011. Regarding gender, 9 interviewees were female and 13 were male.

3.3.6 Formal interview procedures

The interviews took place over five weeks on UNNC campus, in a meeting room, temporarily empty classrooms, and so on, for the sake of the interviewee's

convenience. During this time I immersed myself in UNNC workplace in order to build trust and rapport with my interviewees. The interview procedures consisted of three stages.

Stage 1

As a first stage, I introduced myself as a postgraduate student at Durham University and explained the project before every formal interview. This was followed by the written introduction (the information sheet for research participants). After accepting my invitation, the interviewee was asked to read the participant informed consent form and sign it. This process went smoothly and all the participants who accepted my invitation signed the form without any questions.

Stage 2

The second stage was a formal interview. Seidman's (2006) three-interview series structure for in-depth interviewing was adopted: interview one focuses on life history; interview two explores the details of experiences; and interview three plumbs the interviewees' understanding of their experiences. Seidman argues that "people's behaviour becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them" (pp. 16-17). While it was difficult to ask the participants to do three interviews (due to their work commitments), it was feasible to structure these three interview approaches into one single interview.

First, I recorded each interviewee's personal information, such as name, age, gender, previous study and work experiences, position and length of time working at UNNC. Second, I tried to warm up the atmosphere of the interview with casual chat to build a relaxed environment and trust, thereby making the interview much like a conversation. Hence, the initial questions in this stage were very general and easy to answer. The content was relevant to the interviewee's biography, and any further dialogue involved sharing similar experiences between the researcher (me) and the interviewee.

Third, I sought to probe the research questions. This part was absolutely central to the interviewing. Each interview roughly followed the seven main questions

refined in the pilot study, with each of these being explored by means of introductory questions, follow-up questions and probing questions. For example, every main question started with an introductory question, which was followed by several follow-up questions or probing questions. The follow-up questions were based on what the interviewee had said so far in the interview, such as "What do you mean by that?" "Could you explain further?" "Is there anything else you would like to say about this problem?" Furthermore, all the participants were asked to describe two situations – one they deemed a successful intercultural experience and another they judged was a failure – to probe their strategies to deal with cultural differences and the factors influencing intercultural communication. In each case, they were asked to describe the details: What happened? What did the two sides say? How did the communication finish? What happened in the end? Why do you think the communication was successful/troubling? Questioning around these points was unstructured, accompanied by a series of prompts with the purpose of elaborating or maintaining the focus of the interview.

Finally, I asked some open-ended questions, such as "What other things would you like to tell me about your intercultural experiences at UNNC, and the ways you have coped with them? Is there anything else you would like to share with me?" The purpose of this part was to probe as much as possible any potentially important information which was not covered by the interview guide.

Stage 3

In stage three I took notes to record several aspects of the interviews: my general impression of the whole interview, e.g. the interviewee's attitudes toward the interview; my own reflections on the interview, e.g. whether the interview place was suitable; and whether the interview process was smooth, and why? This stage helped me to quickly familiarise myself with the interview content before analysing the data. It was also important for my reflexivity in the writing-up stage.

All the formal interview conversations were audio-recorded on an MP4 recorder, except one in which the interviewee did not want me to. I presumed that she knew of my experience at UNNC and thus did not want to take the risk of her thoughts being spread among her colleagues. However, she agreed to an interview, possibly

because we knew each other. In effect, the conversation went very well, and I got valuable information from her experience. In this interview I took extensive notes, which the interviewee agreed to.

3.4 Data analysis strategy and procedures

The data analysis started in the period of the fieldwork, during which the pilot study and data transcription were completed, and continued informally during the writing-up of my post-interview evaluations (stage 3 above). More systematic analysis was dealt with afterwards. This section sets out the data analysis strategy and procedures as follows: the principles of data transcription (3.4.1); the choice of thematic data analysis (3.4.2); the data analysis procedures (3.4.3); and issues relevant to bilingual presentation (3.4.4).

3.4.1 Transcription of the data

Transcribing interview data is a crucial step in which massive amounts of data could be lost or distorted, and the complexity could be reduced (Cohen, et al., 2007). In transcribing the interview data, I realized that code switching between Chinese and English was quite common in the accounts of some interviewees, but mainly at the word or phrase level, probably due to the fact that the official language at UNNC was English, and hence they were used to talking and thinking bilingually. I decided to transcribe the interviews verbatim in the original language (that is, mainly in Chinese with some and occasional English words or phrases, as the participants had originally uttered the words) (see Appendix 9 for a sample transcript in which I deliberately omit some content for the sake of confidentiality). One issue that I encountered in the course of transcribing the data was that I had trouble in judging the gender of the person whom my interviewee had talked about in the interview conversations since the pronunciation of the four pronouns: "he"/ "she" and "him"/ "her" is the same in Chinese. In the course of interviewing, I did not ask the interviewees to clarify gender in order to keep the interview running smoothly. I therefore decided to use male pronouns "he" or "him" to represent the expatriate mentioned in the conversations, unless I was able to judge the person's gender from the conversational context.

Subsequently, I sent these transcriptions back to the participants so they could check the accuracy of the transcription. Two participants slightly modified their conversation because they thought some of the content was too private to be published. I responded to them that I would respect their requests.

3.4.2 The data analysis strategy

The strategies and procedures of data analysis followed a comprehensive and systematic method of thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis refers to "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p.79). The main benefits of thematic analysis are its accessibility and theoretical flexibility in analysing qualitative data. It can be applied in a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches, such as essentialism, realism and constructionism. Braun and Clarke also claim that the theoretical flexibility of thematic analysis "provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (p.78). For example, this method allows themes to emerge inductively from data (data-driven), or to be driven deductively by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area (theory-driven), or to emerge from a hybrid of inductive and deductive approaches (e.g. Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

For the purposes of this study, a hybrid approach to thematic analysis is more suitable. First, I adopted Osland and Bird's (2005-2006; 2000) cultural sensemaking model as the analytical framework of the study. In this sense, the study is deductive. This approach enabled me to group initial data extracts around relevant research questions. In addition, after this initial grouping, an inductive approach of going back and forth among the data and the literature started to play a key role. If the data fitted with relevant literature, I could borrow suitable concepts or classifications. The purpose of doing this was to make the link between theory and my empirical work.

A second decision concerned the "level" at which themes were identified: semantic or latent. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), in a semantic approach themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data, and the analysis is limited to what a participant has said or what has been written. In

contrast, a thematic analysis at a latent level is intended to identify underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data. This latter level was obviously appropriate to the analysis of my data. From a social constructionist perspective, meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced. Hence, a thematic analysis within this framework needs to "seek to theorize the sociocultural context, and structural conditions that enable the individual accounts that are provided" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85).

3.4.3 Data analysis procedures

Having clarified some concepts relevant to thematic analysis, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six thematic analysis phases to analyse my data (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87)

Phase	Description of the process
1.Familiarizing yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2.Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3.Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2); generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5.Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

The key point in phase 1 of data analysis is to "immerse yourself in the data to the extent that you are familiar with the depth and breadth of the content" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87) by transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas and so forth. After the data were transcribed and checked, I printed out each transcription with a cover sheet that gave an overview of each interview. The cover sheet consisted of three parts. Part one was the interviewee profile including an identity code assigned by myself to protect confidentiality and the bio-data. Part two was the interviewee's answers to every question in the interview. Part three was my interview notes taken by myself in Chinese after interviews if I felt necessary, recording my general impression of the interview and my own reflections. My purpose in doing this was partly to facilitate a quick matching of each transcription with the interviewee, and partly to familiarize myself with the data.

Another way to immerse myself in the data was to read and re-read the conversations one by one on paper. Along with the reading, I started to underline important words and phrases in pencil, and summarise these extracts in the margin in either Chinese or English. Meanwhile, I still listened to the audio data in the evening when I was too tired to read and in the morning when I had just woken up. In this way, I felt that I had become very familiar with these data. Although this process was very time-consuming and at times challenging, it enabled me to match in my mind the content with the interviewees' personal experiences and their context. In the later stages of data analysis it would be important for me to understand how the interviewee's reality was socially constructed.

Having familiarized myself with the whole data set, I started to code my data by writing notes in the margins. At the beginning of stage 2, I attempted to treat each data item equally and code as many potential themes as possible. I was trying to treat the data as a whole unit and was looking for themes, but this turned out to be inappropriate. In the course of initially coding the data, I found that it was very rich and detailed. Such a wide range of emerging ideas and categories seemed too much for one project. In addition, because of the range and depth of the data, I occasionally got lost in it.

Thus, after the broad "bottom up" (data-driven) coding, I went back to my

research questions to see if the data collected were rich enough to answer those questions, and then tried to seek answers corresponding to each research question among the data items. This second "top down" (theory-driven) method enabled me to focus on one question or theme at a time, and hence enabled me to relate the coding process to the research aims and questions. For example, in Chapter 2, I identified the first research question I needed to explore as concerning the participants' perceptions of cultural differences, according to Osland and Bird's (2005-2006) model. Therefore, I began by putting all the data extracts about the participants' understanding of and comments on cultural differences in a Word file. This mixed coding approach helped keep the research open to new directions and interpretations, while at the same time keeping the research aims in mind. As a result, the initial codes derived from both bottom-up and top-down coding were divided into two parts. Those relevant to the research questions were grouped together and the others were temporarily put in an "others" group for further analysis later.

After the initial codes had been constructed, I started to group these data extracts and codes into an Excel file, but soon found that it was inappropriate. The process of coding was iterative and full of un-coding, re-coding and un-grouping and regrouping, which was very inconvenient to do in an Excel file. Thus, I was advised to learn NVivo software and use it to assist my data analysis. Spending time on learning this software was worthwhile since it shortened the process of my data analysis. From then on, the process of data analysis was carried out using NVivo 9. First, I copied all the transcriptions stored in Word files into my new NVivo project as internal documents. Second, each initial code became a free "node" in NVivo. In other words, each free node had one code as a heading matching corresponding extracts from the text. For example, all extracts about the participants' perceptions of cultural differences were stored in the node "perceptions of cultural differences". In this stage, these free nodes were unorganised nodes and only captured general themes.

In stage 3, I started to establish a node structure based on the research questions. For example, all the codes relevant to the first question (HCS's perceptions of cultural differences) were grouped and revised again and again. Meanwhile, I

went back to the literature and attempted to seek differences and similarities. For example, in searching for themes relevant to HCS's perceptions of cultural differences, I found that the participants constructed cultural differences of three types: personality, communication styles, and cultural values. Research on personality is in the field of psychology and so I had to read literature relevant to personality. Once the subthemes had been established, I created three nodes under the node "perceptions of cultural differences": differences in personality, differences in communication styles, and differences in cultural values. In the same way, I created two nodes under the node "differences in personality", two nodes under the node "differences in communication styles", and four nodes under the node "differences in cultural values". As I did this, the hierarchical structures of the nodes were gradually created and their relationships became apparent. The names of the nodes were gradually developed into the themes and subthemes of this study (see Appendix 10 for a sample of node structure about the first question).

Stages 4, 5 and 6 of the data analysis were intertwined with each other. In effect, after collating all the codes into potential themes, I started to write up the data findings chapter by chapter, discussing the preliminary findings with my supervisor and then refining again and again. Meanwhile, I presented them at two international conferences in November 2012 and April 2013. From these presentations I received valuable suggestions about the theoretical framework, the ways I analysed the data and the themes I had categorized. For example, in the second conference, some experts questioned the framework I had adopted and suggested that I should make the reasons why I adopted it clear.

The whole process of data analysis turned out to be complex. Because of my scientific academic background (my first degree was applied mathematics and my master's degree was management science and engineering), I ignored the diversity and complexity of the data, and tried to fit my data into existing categories from the literature in the first stages of data analysis. Fortunately, the problem was pointed out by my supervisor who pulled me back from a quantitative to a qualitative approach to analysing my data. The process of data analysis was a process of knowledge and research skill building. It happened gradually, but

eventually the phenomena and the issues in question became clear through the processes described above, which led to the development of the next two chapters (findings and discussion) of this thesis.

3.4.4 Bilingual data presentation

Because I had decided to translate only those text extracts to be presented in this thesis into English, the issues relevant to translation were tackled at the end of the data analysis, although some of them were already encountered in the pilot study. First, according to Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998), Chinese tends to use the pronoun *we* to express not only group views but also personal ones, in that it emphasizes a "we" identity and an in-group affiliation. While translating the data extracts, I did in fact find that my interviewees used pronouns such as "I" or "we", and "they" or "he"/ "she" interchangeably, and thus I had to judge what the pronouns represented, relying on the conversational context. I had to clarify them in the English translation version so that readers could understand the whole extract easily. As I extracted and translated, following Wang's (2010a) method, minor editing was done in order to render the interview excerpts more readable. As a result, conversational fillers such as "erm…" and "hum…" were deliberately omitted and "all the sentences were rendered as grammatical and complete as possible" (p.126).

What drove me to present bilingual data was that I found that it was often impossible to literally translate word by word from Chinese to English. As Berreman (2004, pp. 184-185; cited in Chen, 2009) concludes from his ethnographical study,

> People of different cultures and different languages categorize their experiences and the world around them differently, and they verbalize them in different ways. Literal translation of words for objects, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs is often impossible.

In order to tackle this issue, I asked a friend, a PhD Chinese student in translation, to check my translation. I also asked a British friend, who was a teacher, to see whether he could understand or not. Hence, the translations have been checked by four people (two friends of mine, the proof-reader of the final thesis and myself). Consequently, the data extracts (both Chinese and English versions) are presented

together in the findings chapters of this thesis, following Berreman's (2004) logic. The purpose is also to give readers the option to choose their preferred language.

3.5 Ethical issues

Ethical issues are important, especially in human research. Qualitative research tends to be more subject to ethical or political constraints, in the sense that concern with ethics goes beyond the production of knowledge (Hammersley, 2008). Ethical issues may arise in each stage of social research (Cohen, et al., 2007). The literature lists numerous ethical issues the researcher should consider when doing social research, and it also admits that it is impossible to take all these issues into consideration in one piece of research. In the present study, particular attention was paid to respecting and protecting the participants' dignity and privacy, along with clarifying the research process as explicitly as possible. In addition, I also cautioned myself to be aware of my potential biases, which I shall elaborate on in section 3.7 (reflexivity).

With respect to potential participants, the protection of their privacy, anonymity and non-traceability probably minimizes harm to them. These considerations are very important to HCS at UNNC. According to Chinese traditional culture, Chinese people generally do not like to give an open appraisal, especially where their organisation is concerned. Neither do they wish to bring about any negative impact on their relationships with their colleagues or on their careers; nor do they like to see their personal experiences being spread widely among their colleagues and the public. Accordingly, pseudonyms have been used and the data on participant characteristics has been aggregated so that nobody can be identified or traced.

In addition, the research was approved by the Ethics Advisory Committee at Durham University. Participants were provided with a consent form, information sheet and bio-data form prior to data collection. In the information sheet, the nature, scope and purpose of the project were outlined, and it was also indicated that all the data gathered would be treated confidentially and participants were free to participate or not. At the same time, there was also a statement that each participant retained the right to withdraw their consent and stop participating in

the study at any time without prejudice. At the beginning of each interview, each participant was asked to sign the "consent form" after reading the information sheet.

3.6 Validity and reliability

Validity is "the extent to which an account accurately represents the phenomena to which it refers" (Hammersley, 1998, p. 62). It is widely recognized that threats to validity cannot be completely removed although they can be minimised (Basit, 2010). According to Hammersley (1992, p. 67), reliability refers to "the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions". Validity and reliability are important criteria for judging the scientific value of quantitative research, but they do not have a common definition in terms of qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the term "trustworthiness", composed of the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to replace the usual quantitative terms – internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. This section deals with the issues relevant to validity and reliability in qualitative terms.

Credibility

Credibility refers to "the adequate representation of the constructions of the social world under study" (Bradley, 1993, p. 436). Lincoln and Guba (1985) list an extensive set of ways to improve the credibility of research while acknowledging the impossibility of including all these methods in one project. Credibility has been addressed in the present study as follows:

1. Through prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Although the period of field work was not long (three stages over two months in total), my involvement with UNNC had been since its establishment, as explained in Chapter 1. During the research period, I kept in touch with my previous colleagues, read UNNC newsletters, relevant journal articles and its online websites. All these activities helped better understanding of the research context and building trust with the participants.

2. Triangulation. The term triangulation generally refers to the process of checking data from a variety of sources, using different collection methods, and possibly from different perspectives (Drew, et al., 2008). It is a quantitative approach to check the validity of a phenomenon by comparing and contrasting its manifestation across multiple sources, and so is not used here. However, Mathison (1988, p. 17) argues that it is realistic that qualitative data from diverse channels "occasionally converge, but frequently are inconsistent and even contradictory". Hence, she shifts the concept of triangulation from a technological solution to ensure validity to the construction of plausible explanations about the phenomena in question through a holistic understanding of the situation. In this study, an attempt is made to interpret the data from multiple theoretical perspectives, such as intercultural communication, cross-cultural management and psychological theories. Furthermore, the context in which HCS's intercultural experiences took place is explained in detail.

3. Peer review or debriefing. This involves external checking of the research process. In this study, feedback has been obtained from multiple channels. In the first place, feedback on the research methods and the final interpretation was sought from my supervisors, resulting in most useful suggestions. I also presented my preliminary work to my researcher peers for feedback, as discussed in section 3.4.3.

4. Clarifying researcher bias. My past experience, potential biases and orientations have been set out in the first chapter so that readers can understand my position and any biases. Much effort was also made to maintain my reflexivity while doing the research in terms of procedure (see section 3.7 for further explanation).

5. Member checking. This process has been explained in Section 3.3.3.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the results of qualitative research can be applied to other contexts or settings. Although it is not a qualitative researcher's task to provide an index of transferability, I have attempted to provide much detail so that readers can determine whether the findings could be

transferred to other settings. For instance, detailed description in terms of the following aspects has been provided: the formulation of the research questions, the selection of the subjects, interviewing the subjects, analyzing the resultant transcriptions, and reporting the final categories of description.

First, the formulation of the research questions in this study aimed to explore HCS's intercultural experiences at UNNC from the perspective of sensemaking by seeking to answer four interrelated research questions. Second, a set of specific criteria – gender, age bracket, study background and type of experience – were often used to ensure variation in the experiences of the participants selected for the sample. In this study, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted to recruit participants based on their gender, age bracket, position at UNNC and whether they had the experience of overseas study, in order to obtain as much variation in intercultural experiences as possible.

Third, my interpretations of the interview data were controlled and checked in a number of ways during the interview process: through the pilot study and the evaluation of it, through a consistent approach in the interviews (informed by Seidman's three interview stages), and by employing a responsive interviewing technique, which allowed the interviewees to focus on the aspects of their intercultural experiences they believed were important rather than "fitting in" with any preconceived theories.

Fourth, during the analysis my interpretations were controlled by means of a strict adherence to the data, usually in the form of interview transcripts. The interview data was read as a whole back and forth, to guarantee understanding of the statements in context. In addition, inconsistencies between transcriptions during the analysis process were clarified, and there was no attempt to constrain the data to appear consistent. Furthermore, the categories were developed in an iterative fashion, with inconsistent transcripts acting as prompts to view the description categories in a different way.

Finally, a set of description themes was formed hierarchically. These descriptions of the themes were reliant on the transcripts, and included illustrative quotes taken from some of the transcripts in order to check the interpretations further.

Dependability and confirmability

Dependability refers both to "the coherence of the internal process" and "the way the researcher accounts for changing conditions in the phenomena", while confirmability refers to "the extent to which the characteristics of the data, as posited by the researcher, can be confirmed by others who read or review the research results" (Bradley, 1993, p. 437). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), dependability and confirmability can be established by enquiry auditors examining the research processes and findings. Thick description and documentation is thus provided to enable readers to track the analytical process.

3.7 Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to "attending to the effects of researcher-participant interactions on the construction of data" (Hall & Callery, 2001, p. 257). It requires the researcher to be aware of his/her own contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and to acknowledge the impossibility of remaining "outside of" one's subject matter while conducting research (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). When doing qualitative research, Bryman (2004, p. 471) emphasizes that "researchers should be reflective about the implications of their methods, values, biases and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they generate". Similarly, Hammersley (2008, p. 38) also states that "qualitative researchers need to become more reflective and open-minded, to recognise the contradictory methodological arguments that now inform their work, and to engage with the serious problems that remain unresolved".

Methodologically, reflexivity has been applied to the research in the following ways. First, and unfortunately, I was unable to obtain observational data to understand the communicative behaviours of my participants in real occasions. Because of this, I tried my best to be reflexive in doing interviews. I felt confident in collecting interview data in Chinese and understanding the nuances of the meaning attached to words and concepts due to my work experience at UNNC and as a native Chinese speaker. In addition, in the interviews no participants mentioned that they did not understand the English version of the consent form, the interviewee bio-data form or the information sheet for research participants.

As stated in section 3.3.2, inviting acquaintances to participate could make the topic of conversation depart from the research focus. Accordingly, I was very cautious in recruiting my participants and made a balance between acquaintances and strangers in order to minimize any potential biases.

In addition, given that this study employed interviews as the main method of data collection, the advantages and disadvantages of this method must be taken into consideration along with the nature of the study. On the one hand, distortions may stem from the researcher. For example, Woods (1986) warns that researchers tend to interpret the past through their current mental framework and their ulterior motives. Furthermore a desire to please the researcher and be valued is likely to impose possible influences on informants. Indeed, in the course of interviews, I sometimes felt so familiar with the stories of the participants that some of them might have escaped my conscious attention, despite my efforts to distance myself and to make the familiar unfamiliar. In addition to this, Woods (1986) also cautions that researchers might select the data which coincides with their priority. I tried to minimize this risk by immersing myself in the data. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, I attempted to explore HCS's experiences through their own retrospective accounts. It is possible for the participants to embellish their experiences and "develop new insights and understanding of their experiences" during the interviewing process (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 98). Although I strived to achieve subjective reality in the experiences of the participants during the course of the interviews and tried to interpret their accounts explicitly, the absence of observational data precluded an opportunity to further enrich my understanding of the participants' intercultural communication experiences with expatriates, and therefore may have affected the reliability of the data.

The fieldwork gave me confidence that doing this kind of research made sense. Doing the interviews, I could feel an attitudinal change in some participants that I already knew. One participant, introduced by a colleague of mine, was very reluctant to agree to my interview. Her reluctance and unwillingness could easily be seen on her face and heard in her voice, but in the end when I asked whether she had some things to share with me, she talked a lot. In addition, the behaviour of two other participants also impressed me. One agreed to be interviewed in her

office in the evening. The other was interviewed twice, as the first time she had to leave for a seminar but thought our conversation was not finished. She therefore invited me to attend the seminar, which gave me a chance to observe her conversion with some expatriates after the seminar. She also introduced some colleagues who took part in my interviews. A possible reason is they were interested in the topic. Another possible reason is related to my personality: my respect and genuineness in interpersonal contact.

Finally, as stated in section 3.3.6, I made notes after interviewing if necessary. These field notes reflected my personal feeling about the interviews, such as my impression of the interviewees and any change in the interviewees' attitudes during the interview. All these details helped me to reflect on the ways I reacted to the interviewees and the accounts I that refer to in this thesis.

Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the methodological orientation selected for this study. Each decision taken has been explained and justified with reference to the literature. First, the application of qualitative research strategy and responsive interviewing to serve the needs of the research purposes has been discussed.

After deciding the method of data collection, the fieldwork was essential to the quality of the research. Owing to the co-construction of the researcher and researched in doing social constructionist research, every effort was made to guarantee the quality of the research. For example, rapport and trust with the participants was established in order to explore the participants' intercultural experiences in depth. In addition, a pilot study provided experience of the main research procedures such as interviewing and data analysis, which made me confident in sampling, recruiting the participants, and formal interviewing. It also helped in the choice of strategies for the data analysis, such as using original transcriptions and Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Furthermore, the fieldnotes taken during the fieldwork aided reflexivity, which enabled me to modify the research methods during the fieldwork.

Finally, this chapter has discussed the ethical issues, the validity and reliability, and the reflexivity of the study. The ethical considerations have mainly focused on the confidentiality of the participants' personal information. Examination of the validity and reliability of the study followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) terms and criteria for qualitative studies: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Finally, I have reflexively explained how I overcame the limitations of this study.

Having delineated the methodological considerations, the next two chapters turn to presenting the findings, addressing how HCS constructed and responded to cultural differences in their intercultural encounters and the possible factors affecting these processes.

Chapter 4 Making sense of cultural differences

According to Weick et al. (2005, p. 409), sensemaking is "about the interplay of interpretation and action". This chapter, the first of two findings chapters, deals with the participants' interpretations of cultural differences as they communicate daily with their expatriate colleagues. Specifically, the findings in this chapter address the first research question of this study: How do HCS make sense of cultural differences in their daily communication with their expatriate counterparts at UNNC? The purpose of this chapter is to provide understanding of the participants' communicative behaviour in their intercultural encounters in order to respond to these cultural differences, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

Following the process of thematic analysis discussed in Chapter 3, from the data I identify three key themes relevant to the participants' construction of cultural differences between themselves and the expatriate staff: differences in personality (section 4.1); differences in communication styles (section 4.2); and differences in values (section 4.3).

4.1 Differences in personality

As established in Chapter 2, how individuals perceive cultural differences in intercultural encounters could be a result of individual personality. To understand and interpret my participants' perceptions of the differences in the expatriates' personalities, I made a comparison between the Five Factor Model (FFM) and the Big Seven, and found that FFM could explain the majority of the data. Therefore, I drew on FFM as a starting point for interpreting the data. However, FFM, derived from quantitative data, could not explain all the complexity of individual personalities, especially in a multicultural context. Bearing this in mind, I first discuss the participants' perceptions of the expatriates' personality traits as they fit FFM in section 4.1.1. In section 4.1.2, I describe other personality traits emerging from the data, but which were not strong enough to become themes. I then conclude this section.

4.1.1 Personality traits

As mentioned above, FFM acted as a starting point for analysing the participants' perceptions about the expatriates' personality traits. Hence, each dimension in FFM is analysed and discussed below.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness consists of such elements as self-discipline, carefulness, thoroughness, self-organisation, deliberation (the tendency to think carefully before acting), and the need for achievement (Costa & McCrae, 1992). An individual possessing this trait is responsible, orderly and dependable. Of the factors in FFM, this trait was the one most noted by the participants. It was manifested in this study by a concern on the part of the expatriates for planning and details, which meant that the participants perceived the expatriates as being thorough, deliberate and careful with regard to work. However, the reflections of the participants regarding this trait were varied: some felt that the expatriates worked slowly and less efficiently while some appreciated this attitude being adopted by the expatriates.

A common perception of the participants was of an emphasis on planning and details by the expatriates. For example:

英国人比较注重什么事情都要plan好的。(Lucy)

The British like to plan everything first before doing. (Lucy)

他们可能外国人来说的话，他们结果当然也注重，但他们非常关注一些细节性的问题。(Robert)

Foreigners may pay great attention to details, although they are concerned about the final outcome as well. (Robert)

那可能对他们来说的话，因为他们完成这个project，细节很重要。因为他们认为的话，每一个细节下的努力可能包括达到的结果，就是它会确保它的结果万无一失，考虑到所有的细节问题，不管这个细节在这个问题中会不会导致……就会不

会对它很受影响，反正它在那个问题范围内，他都会考虑的。(Robert)

Maybe, they believe that details are crucial for completing the project, i.e. every detail may influence the achievement of the final result. In order to guarantee the expected outcome, they will take every detail into consideration, no matter whether it would impact the outcome or not. (Robert)

To some extent, the expatriates' concern for and emphasis on planning and details caused participants to regard the expatriates as rigorous and considerate in working and thinking, which can be shown by the following extracts:

我跟他的沟通当中也有一个很切身的体会，就是说他们做事情就是一点一点做的非常的细致。这是我说的他们优点的地方……他们做事情，想问题确实比较周全。(Kelly)

After those contacts with them, I feel like they are very considerate and thorough toward work. This is their merit. (Kelly)

我觉得他们都有一个这样子的共性，不是因为国籍的共性，就是说他们在对待事情相对来说非常的严谨，要求非常的严格。这个方面有共性，也就是说对一个事情比较追求完美。(William)

I feel that they have something in common. Of course, I'm not talking about their nationality, but their common attitude towards work, very scrupulous with strict standards, i.e. believing in perfection. (William)

Nevertheless, the data suggest that there were two totally diverse viewpoints on this characteristic feature. Some participants claimed that the working pace of the expatriates was comparatively slower than that of the Chinese. Fred claimed:

还有就是老外的节奏相对来说比较慢，我们国家现在发展比较快，所以工作的节奏比较快，办事效率相对比较高。(Fred)

Besides, the working paces of foreigners are comparatively slower. Ours are faster and more efficient since the speed of development of our country is rapid. (Fred)

In the eyes of some participants, plans tended not to keep up with changes, which was, for example, stated by Tom. Hence, Chinese people tended to place a heavy

emphasis on efficiency rather than planning in detail, which consumed much time. This perception could be explained from the perspective of the new identity of Chinese culture in the era of globalization, as discussed in section 2.2. In the last three decades, huge changes have happened in China due to the rapid development of the economy; underlying this phenomenon is the Chinese pursuit of speed. The Chinese people generally think that they lost too much time during the period of the "cultural revolution", which happened in the 1960s and 1970s, and they suffered from severe poverty. As a result, they were eager to get away from poverty and catch up with the pace of development in the outside world. In this kind of macro environment, speed is regarded as a priority. Therefore, the view expressed in Tom's account is prevalent in China. Having grown up in this kind of social environment, it is not hard to understand that some participants did not appreciate "the slower pace of the expatriates", at least at the beginning of their contact.

However, in contrast to the negative comment above, Jane had a different reflection on this characteristic:

> 但是我觉得他们速度慢并不是因为他们故意的在拖延不做，如果是拖延不做的话可能是他们工作量太大了，我认为他们速度慢是因为他们做事情确实更加周全一点。(Jane)

> But I think their inefficiency is not deliberate. If they delay and don't finish things, it is because the task might be very big. I think their inefficiency might be caused by their thorough thinking. (Jane)

In support of this viewpoint, Ted gave a detailed interpretation. He explained:

> 英国人他们会比较喜欢plan。他们都会对project的plan，schedule讨论过来讨论过去，对我们来说就不是那么effective, 或者说efficient。(Ted)

> British people prefer planning. They will discuss the plan and schedule of a project again and again, which seems not so effective or efficient to us. (Ted)

He further explained that it seemed to make the whole process of a project slow down, but it also had its benefits. He thought that the comparatively slow working

pace based on thorough and comprehensive thinking was to some extent efficient from a long-term point of view.

In summary, it is apparent that the expatriates were concerned with planning and details and carefulness and thoroughness in work from the perspective of the participants. Nonetheless, different participants gave different interpretations, based on their own experiences.

Openness to experience

Openness to experience involves active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, attentiveness to inner feelings, preference for variety, and intellectual curiosity (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The manifestation of this personality trait in this study was in the expatriates' curiosity about Chinese traditional culture and openness to new ideas in the workplace. The former is exemplified by Joseph's account:

> 可能他们会对中国文化比较新奇。比如说中国的京剧，剪纸什么之类的，他们会觉得怎么这么好看，这么有意思。我也不知道他们是真觉得好看，还是有意思，还是觉得很新奇，他们会对中国的文化……来这边的老外会对中国的文化特别感兴趣，至少是不厌恶。(Joseph)

> They are curious about Chinese culture such as Beijing opera and paper-cuts. They feel how beautiful and interesting these are. I am also not sure whether these are really beautiful and interesting or curious to them. But foreigners here are practically interested in Chinese culture, at least not disgusted. (Joseph)

This opinion was echoed by Robert. He believed that they were more interested in Chinese culture and hence kept in touch with local Chinese people so as to understand them more deeply and closely. This type of person, as Amelia concluded, tended to be open-minded to new culture. These expatriates tended to be interested in the way cultural others did things and tried to understand them from the others' perspectives. For example, John noticed that the expatriates who were researching international relationships liked to be in contact with HCS. He further presumed that they probably wanted to understand Chinese customs and rituals and current news from the perspective of local Chinese speakers.

In addition to curiosity about Chinese culture, the participants tended to use the English word "open-minded" to describe the expatriates' openness to others' ideas. A possible reason is that the participants have become used to expressing their ideas in English when they cannot find a suitable Chinese word, while the Chinese translation of the English word "open" tends to have negative connotations, often being used to describe the openness of a woman with regard to sexual relations. From the participants' perspective, the expatriates seemed ready to accept new ideas from others irrespective of their positions in the organisation and their nationalities. For example, Tom said:

老外开会就是**畅所欲言，有什么你就说，不用举手还是顾及领导的面子**。[因此] 有的时候就是说自己有什么想法，马上就raise，好的话整个committee我们就接受。就是这样。(Tom)

In the meeting, foreigners **express their ideas openly**, saying whatever they want **without raising their hands or caring about the leader's face**. As a result of this, sometimes, as soon as I have my own idea, I will raise my hand and voice it. If the idea is good, the committee will accept it immediately. That's it. (Tom)

Here, Tom used a positive phrase "畅所欲言" (*chang suo yu yan*; express their ideas openly) to describe the expatriates' openness to new ideas. Nevertheless, he subsequently explained this point by using "without caring for the leader's face". His explanation seems to imply that he did not need to take hierarchy into consideration in expressing his own ideas, which is against Confucian doctrine: subordinates should obey their superiors. Hence, from this perspective, the expatriates' openness to new ideas to some extent is an external manifestation of lower power distance.

However, the degree of openness varies. From the perspective of Veronica,

英国人的话相对比较保守。那像美国人的话相比较而言的话就会更加开放一点。(Veronica)

The British are comparatively reserved while the Americans are relatively a bit more open. (Veronica)

Here, Veronica used "British" and "Americans" to generalize her impression of those with whom she was familiar. Obviously, she is stereotyping, and this pattern of stereotyping was used by several others to explain differences. More similar examples were found in the data. For instance,

日本老师他们很重视礼仪嘛。(Ted)

As for the Japanese teachers, they pay more attention to courtesies. (Ted)

意大利人做事急躁，但做错立刻道歉。(Vivian)

The Italians do things hastily but they will apologise immediately when they do things wrong. (Vivian)

你会发现往往就是德国人和奥地利人，他们肯定会守时，他们肯定会在deadline之前把东西交给你，但是往往就是意大利人他们会随意的。(Valerie)

You will find that the Germans and Austrians are definitely punctual and they hand in what they have to do exactly before the deadline, while the Italians tend to be more flexible. (Valerie)

In addition, the participants were used to using "they", "foreigners", and "foreign teachers" as catch-all phases to refer to the whole cluster of the expatriates at UNNC. Indeed, these kinds of general words pervade the whole data set (as evidenced in the previous and following data extracts). According to Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory, people tend to exaggerate the differences between intergroups, drawing on stereotypes, and make general assumptions about other groups (generalisations) when they know little about that group. I will further discuss this point in the summary section of this chapter, because these kinds of perceptions were quite common among my participants.

In summary, these accounts suggest that some expatriates at UNNC tended to be curious about Chinese culture and open-minded to new ideas.

Extraversion

People possessing an extrovert personality tend to enjoy human interactions and

to be enthusiastic, talkative, assertive, and gregarious (Costa & McCrae, 1992). They enjoy being with people and are often perceived as being full of energy. In groups, they like to talk, assert themselves, and draw attention to themselves. The manifestations of extrovert character in this study mainly consisted of the expatriates' predilection for partying and assertiveness on public occasions.

The first manifestation of extraversion was demonstrated in perceptions of the expatriates enjoying social occasions where they could be expressive and relaxed. For example, Fred said,

> 有些外籍教师很热情，他经常会邀请中方员工去外面吃饭，去他家开party，相对来说这种人比较吃得开。(Fred)

> Some foreign teachers are very enthusiastic. They often invite Chinese staff to go out for dinner, or to go to their houses for a party. This type of expatriate is comparatively more welcome. (Fred)

Additionally, in the context of public occasions such as dinner parties, Jane mentioned that the expatriates appeared to be enjoying themselves when chatting with others, even while waiting for the beginning of the party, while her Chinese colleagues at that time prefer to wait for the dinner, sitting on the chairs and just chatting casually. Hence, in Jane's eyes,

> 他们很喜欢party的文化，他们很喜欢交友。其实他们可能对生活中的也好，对自己的所见所闻的那种交流，好像那种欲望比中国人强很多。(Jane)

> They like the culture of parties and making friends. Actually, they are much more eager to share their experiences with others than Chinese people. (Jane)

This feeling perceived by Jane was also echoed by Robert, who expressed a similar opinion referring to differences in language learning between Chinese and expatriates. If foreigners just learned some simple Chinese phrases, such as "你好" (hello) and "再见"(goodbye), they like to use them when communicating with Chinese people, while Chinese people prefer not to show their proficiency in English.

As mentioned in section 2.2.2, *han xu* (含蓄; implicit communication) is regarded as one of the five characteristics of Chinese communication (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Chinese people traditionally believe *qiang da chu tou niao* (枪打出头鸟; shoot the bird which takes the lead; or, the nail that sticks up most gets hammered down), *huo cong kou chu* (祸从口出; misfortune comes from the mouth) and *yan duo bi shi (*言多必失; the one who talks errs much). Behind these Chinese sayings are Confucian rules, such as concerning a desire to maintain harmony and modesty. Hence, Chinese culture seems not to encourage people to be assertive, especially on public occasions. These Confucian rules still seem popular, at least among this cluster of the HCS according to the accounts of the above participants.

Agreeableness

Agreeable people are generally considerate, friendly, generous, helpful, and willing to compromise their interests with others (Costa & McCrae, 1992). They value getting along with others and believe that people are basically honest, decent, and trustworthy (Costa & McCrae). With regard to this trait, the expatriates manifested a concern for daily rituals on the one hand and being helpful and friendly on the other. In terms of the former, the comments from the participants varied. As for the latter, participants gave positive comments.

The data in this study show that the expatriates were generally polite, regardless of whether they were senior managers or general staff, which was mentioned by many participants (such as Joseph, Jennifer, William, and Mary). They tended to be concerned with the rituals of daily life, such as greeting enthusiastically, as Robert mentioned; the use of a polite tone and words, according to Herbert; and sending postcards during a trip and bringing gifts back from travelling, as Valerie recalled. In addition, they were "easily pleased", as Ted commented, in that he would be shown appreciation again and again even if he only did something little for them. Even though they were the participants' superiors, the expatriates preferred to use polite expressions such as "Could you please…" and "Please…" to ask their subordinates to do something relevant to work. As Jane remarked, they did not actually need to be so polite because it was her role to do what her

superior ordered. Some participants used positive adjectives such as "nice" and "polite" to comment on the expatriates' politeness and courtesy. As Jane acknowledged,

他们就觉得不管身处在什么样的位置上面，这些都是最基本的礼貌礼节。从小可能他们就是这样培养的，所以完全不受任何的原因来约束，他们都会来遵守。(Jane)

They treat these actions as the most basic politeness and courtesy, and they comply with them no matter who they are and which positions they hold. Maybe, they were taught to behave like this since they were children and thereby conditioned to behave in this way. (Jane)

Again, under the influence of Confucian rules such as attention to social order and hierarchical respect, Chinese subordinates are used to taking doing things for their superiors for granted, especially in the workplace. Hence, this type of reaction is usually encountered only when one asks someone who is not close to do extra things. In addition, Chinese people rarely use polite expressions such as "thank you" and "excuse me" among in-group members (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Indeed, in the course of the interviews some participants unconsciously repeated a Chinese adjective "客气" (*ke qi*) to describe the expatriates' politeness and courtesy. This adjective is used to express Chinese people's good impression of a stranger or an acquaintance, rather than of a close friend. As Yu and Gu (1990; cited in Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998) conclude, the ritual of *ke qi* can be perceived and interpreted as insincere, distant, and removed when used in the context of a close relationship, such as between husbands and wives and close friends. They further explain that Chinese people can show inclusion to an out-group member by not applying the ritual of *ke qi*. Likewise, Chinese people also show exclusion to an in-group member by insisting on observing *ke qi*. Mary's interpretation echoed the above view. She felt that the expatriates' politeness and courtesy to some extent made her feel a sense of distance.

On the other hand, in comparison with their varying interpretations of the expatriates' concern for rituals, the participants generally acknowledged the expatriates' helpfulness, generosity and kindness, which were exemplified by both

Mary and Valerie. As a new member of staff and technical supporter, Mary was not familiar with relevant educational equipment at the very beginning of her career at UNNC, so sometimes she could not provide a normal service to the teachers. At that time, an expatriate teacher was very patient in waiting for her to set up some equipment and give her some suggestions based on his rich experience. On one occasion, Valerie encountered something that she did not know how to deal with and tried to find a solution by ringing a Chinese and a foreign colleague. Unfortunately, neither of them knew the solution. She told me that the Chinese colleague was most likely just to tell her that he or she did not know, and to suggest she report to her senior, while her foreign colleague tried to find the solution for her. Hence, in Valerie's eyes, the expatriate was more helpful.

In summary, the expatriates at UNNC were generally perceived as being courteous and helpful, partly owing to their concern with rituals. Nevertheless, concern for rituals could also bring about a sense of distance between interlocutors from the perspective of the participants, although most of the participants acknowledged the expatriates' politeness and courtesy.

Emotional stability/ Neuroticism

People who have a neurotic personality seem to frequently experience negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, or depression (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The opposite of neuroticism is emotional stability, with people tending to be calm and even-tempered. From the participants' perspective, the expatriates at UNNC are emotionally stable under most circumstances, while a few of them are occasionally neurotic. As stated previously, the expatriates were generally perceived to be nice, polite, open and so on. They seemed less susceptible to the environment around them, as Kelly observed:

> 有一个特色，老外基本上不跟你吵架的，然后就是说，他们面上都是(人)蛮和气
> 的。然后他如果说已经很生气，打个比方说，虽然我没见过，我也听说的事，我
> 听说但是我没有跟老外吵过架，但是有听说他真的已经很生气了，他也就是言词
> 上会比较，比直接更直接吧，应该这么说。就是一般来说他不至于会跟你吵架。
> (Kelly)

One feature of foreigners is that they generally do not quarrel with you, and are superficially kind. I have heard, although I have never experienced a quarrel with them, that they generally express themselves more directly rather than quarrel with you, even though they may feel really angry. (Kelly)

Nevertheless, some participants felt that a very few expatriates sometimes seemed less friendly and nice. For example, the attitude of some expatriates was not so good when complaining about something to HCS. They would shout and not give any chance for HCS to explain. Amelia once encountered such an outburst, although she admitted that this case was very unusual:

他来了到我办公室，一开始就是说，当然一开始就是说声音很大。一看你这个情绪是非常激动的，然后说话也很极端，就是说这些事情或者怎么怎么样不好，这样说。他说了很久了，等我看他稍微有一点间隙的时候，我试图就是说跟他说，然后去做就是基本信息方面解释的时候，他就不听，不给我这样的机会，他马上把我给堵回去，然后声音变的更大。最后就变成就是对着我来喊，就是说喊，你们怎么怎么样，就是这样的。最后的话我后来就是说试图的那么再试图了两次，就是说让他情绪稳下来，听我说，就是试图让他听我说给我一个说话机会，都不行。最后我觉得没有办法了，而且他确实是第一就是说很不professional，第二一点礼貌都没有，然后就不给你说话的机会，而且他就是完全不是一个正常的这种complain。完全类似于撒泼这种的，那我就不理他了。(Amelia)

Once, he came to my office, beginning the conversation with a loud voice. Obviously, he was very angry, using extreme words, shouting for a long time. I tried to explain to him when he briefly paused, but he immediately interrupted me and did not give me any chance to explain. And then, his voice became much louder and he eventually shouted at me. I tried twice to persuade him to calm him down so as to have the chance to explain to him. But I failed, both times. Ultimately, I had to ignore him because he did not behave professionally on the one hand nor politely on the other. (Amelia)

In effect, Amelia's encounter was not unique. Although it was unusual, some participants also had similar encounters. Fred mentioned that not all the expatriates had a gentle manner in the course of daily contact. Some expatriates, occasionally at least, appeared not to be calm: some were very aggressive and went shouting at HCS, as Valerie mentioned; or some kept talking without pausing

and without giving a chance for HCS to explain, as Kelly found when something did not go as the expatriate hoped.

Traditionally, open emotional expressions, especially strong and negative ones such as anger and depression, are not encouraged in Chinese society (Hsu, 1971). Moderation in emotional expressions is regarded as essential to achieving internal balance in the human body, while extreme emotions are often viewed as sources of various health problems from the perspective of Chinese traditional medicine (Bond, 1993). In addition, moderation in emotional expressions is viewed as belonging to the highest realm of individual moral cultivation, and is one of the notable features in Confucian moderation (Wang & Cui, 2005). Furthermore, possessing a neurotic personality risks breaking interpersonal harmony and causing others to lose face; such behaviours are discouraged in Chinese society.

Nevertheless, some participants attributed the expatriates' occasional neuroticism to their "ethnocentrism, prejudice and discrimination". Ethnocentrism refers to considering the views and standards of one's own culture as much more important than any other (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). Thomas (1996) asserts that those within a dominant group are inclined to use their own cultural context as a standard and expect its values to be taken for granted and aspired to by minority groups. A consciousness of privilege can derive from ethnicity or nation. For example, Thomas notes that people from developed countries such as the US and the UK are likely to regard their thinking as superior, and therefore force others, such as Chinese, to obey them, whether in the working environment or in family life. Although such a view might be considered outdated in the age of globalisation, and somewhat essentialist, it can be seen in the findings in this study. For example, Yi Wang, John and Mike felt that some expatriates had a more or less ethnocentric tendency.

> 还有一种外国人就是对自己特别骄傲，觉得自己是个什么东西，很高高在上。
> (Barbara)

> There exists another kind of foreigners, who are very proud of themselves, and always see themselves as dominant, superior to other people. (Barbara)

可能有些老外觉得自己高中国人一等吧，这种人会有的。(John)

Probably some foreigners think they are a cut above the Chinese. (John)

我个人觉得还是有部分的人还是有文化的优越性存在，也就是说俯视我们这种制度和国家出来的。(Mike)

Personally speaking, indeed, I think some foreign staff do have a sense of superiority, that is, they look down upon us because we were born in China and made by China. (Mike)

In addition to ethnocentrism, prejudice is another possible factor associated with neuroticism. According to Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005), "prejudice is a sense of antagonistic hostility toward a group as a whole or toward an individual because she or he is a member of that group" in the intercultural context. The data suggests that most of the expatriates at UNNC were unable to speak Chinese. Thus, the expatriates' source of information about Chinese people was most likely to be colleagues, or those who had intimate relationships with them such as spouses or boyfriends/girlfriends, along with the public media. This kind of second-hand information has been filtered by others and is not always applicable in different contexts. If this kind of information is combined with limited negative experiences, then the expatriates may over-generalise this kind of mindset and hence become prejudiced. For example, some expatriates tended to equate the Chinese political system with the Chinese people, as Amelia mentioned, and some would make generalizations based on negative comments which they had heard about China, as John related. The following accounts reflect this impression:

因为也许他遇到的人是那样的心理，他就会觉得你也是这样的心理。或者他从骨子里觉得，我知道你们的花招tricks。这种现象还是有的，这种感觉有偏见。(Rebecca)

Maybe because they had met someone who was like that, they may suppose we are the same too, or they are probably predisposed to believe that: "I know you might play some tricks". People like this, who are prejudiced towards us, indeed exist in our university. (Rebecca)

Furthermore, discrimination is probably another reason for HCS to encounter hostile treatment from the expatriates. Obviously, the position of academic staff in a university is much higher than that of the administrative staff. UNNC is no exception. According to an observation from Valerie, some expatriates tended to order administrators to do things for them without leaving any room for discussion, while they were very nice to their academic colleagues. It seemed to her that these expatriates supposed themselves to be superior to administrators. This supposition was confirmed by an expatriate friend of hers:

> 我有问过，跟我工作相关的那些外教我跟他们关系很好，我跟他们也提过，他们的理解就是有一些academic把自己当成something。就是把自己当成很重要的角色，然后他们对admin向来是，就像医生对护士一样，就觉得有歧视的那种感觉。(Valerie)

> I once discussed discrimination with some foreign staff, my friends. They confirmed my supposition: they are academic staff, so they consider themselves to be important personages, which is like the discrimination of some doctors against nurses. (Valerie)

In summary, along with the perceptions of expatriates' general emotional stability, a few examples indicated that some expatriates did show neurotic traits to HCS. From the perspective of the participants, ethnocentrism, prejudice and discrimination were probably the potential factors giving rise to this negative emotion.

So far, this section has applied FFM as a starting point for analysing the participants' perceptions of the differences in personality between expatriates and HCS. In the analysis, this attempt has seemed effective as themes have emerged and commonalities become apparent in that the vast majority of the data relevant to personalities could be subsumed within FFM, although the degree and scope varies from person to person. However, some of the data do not seem to belong to any of the five dimensions, and thus I shall elaborate on them in the next subsection.

4.1.2 Other personality traits

In addition to FFM factors, some other personality traits are also found in the data set but not strongly enough to form themes. These traits were either mentioned by few participants or had little bearing on the main research purpose. Thus, I adopt the following labels to categorise and make sense of these data:

Humour and wit. This means that expatriates usually like to joke or make fun of themselves. For example, Valerie mentioned that her Italian colleagues might comfort themselves with some black humour sometimes when they were unlucky. Fred also said that the expatriates could sometimes burst out with a joke and thus a sense of humour was needed in communication with them.

Tolerance/intolerance. This means that some expatriates can tolerate their colleagues' faults and be cooperative, while a very few expatriates could not tolerate anything different from their own countries. In terms of the former, Mary gave an example of something that happened to herself. As a new technician, she needed time to learn how to set up educational equipment. Therefore, small mistakes did happen when she was cooperating with expatriates. However, some of her expatriate colleagues were very tolerant which gave her a deep impression of their tolerance. In terms of the intolerance, very few expatriates could not tolerate anything different from their own countries. For example, Veronica mentioned that one expatriate once asked for there to be drinkable water in the public toilets at UNNC, which is impossible in the context of China.

The above findings indicate that FFM cannot explain all the data relevant to personality. Among the above findings, the traits of humour and wit coincide with Paunonen and Jackson's (2000) findings. In addition, their investigation also uncovered some other dimensions of personality, such as religiosity, manipulativeness, honesty, masculinity/femininity, snobbishness, and so forth. Accordingly, personality traits have the same limitations as the dimensions of cultural values. Nevertheless, the main purpose of this section is to understand how HCS constructed cultural differences in terms of personality. In effect, there was not much data going beyond FFM. In that sense, FFM framework offered a

useful understanding of HCS's perspectives on the expatriates' personalities in their intercultural encounters, although it fails to explain all the data such as that connected to humour and wit, and tolerance and intolerance.

4.1.3 Conclusions

This section has offered an understanding of the participants' construction of cultural differences in terms of how they make sense of expatriates' personalities as it is manifested primarily in the context of the workplace.

The majority of the data in this study concerning participants' perceptions of expatriates' personality traits fall within the framework of FFM. Among the five traits, conscientiousness received the most attention from the participants. The participants were surprised by the expatriates' concern for details and schedules. In addition to conscientiousness, the expatriates tended to be open to experience (curiosity about Chinese culture and openness to new ideas in the workplace). As stated in section 2.4.1, several studies have demonstrated that the openness to experience of FFM was not strong enough to be a dimension in Asian and Chinese personality structure. The participants' sensitiveness to the expatriates' openness to some extent implies a lack of this trait in general on the part of HCS. The third trait, extraversion, presented itself in the context of both work and life. From the perspective of the participants, for example, in the public context, the expatriates tended to enjoy and be expressive in social occasions. In terms of agreeableness, the expatriates were perceived as being polite, nice and helpful in general. Finally, in terms of the neurotic trait being manifested in the workplace by the expatriates, some participants admitted that this condition did exist occasionally, although most of the expatriates were emotionally stable. One possible explanation is that neuroticism may have been due to ethnocentrism, prejudice and discrimination, which the participants perceived as being manifest in some expatriates' communication and behaviour.

As stated in Chapter 2, FFM was derived from quantitative investigations based on specific hypotheses and mono-cultural contexts. Despite this, FFM is useful to explain most of the findings relevant to personality, at least as far as the

participants' perceptions of expatriates' dispositions in intercultural communication in this study are concerned. Nevertheless, FFM cannot explain all the data related to personality. In addition to the five personality traits, a few other personality traits such as humour and wit and tolerance/intolerance were also mentioned by the participants, although they were not strong enough to form themes.

In section 2.4.1, I presented two models of personality traits: FFM and the Big Seven. The data analysis here shows that FFM is able to explain most of the findings relevant to personality, at least as far as the participants' perceptions of cultural differences in this study are concerned. In effect, when I began the data analysis, I examined the two models to explore their fit with my data, that is, which model might better enable me to make sense of the data. I found that FFM is more suitable compared with the Big Seven. A possible explanation is that most of the expatriates at UNNC are from English-speaking countries and thus FFM, derived from English vocabulary, is more applicable in explaining their dispositional behaviours than the Big Seven from Chinese vocabulary. Hence, the findings in this study seem to support the claim that FFM is more suitable for explaining English-speaking people's personality (Shweder, 1991).

Meanwhile, in interpreting the cultural differences, the participants also gave various meanings based on their own frames of reference or past experiences, as illustrated in the examples given by HCS. For example, some participants acknowledged the expatriates' concern for planning and details, while some commented negatively on this. In addition, the macro context of contemporary Chinese society, and conversely, traditional Chinese culture, manifested in Confucian values, also exerted an influence on the participants' perceptions. For instance, the high-speed development of the Chinese economy made some HCS emphasise efficiency and thus not appreciate expatriates' concern for planning and details. In addition, the participants' perceptions also manifested their own cultural values. They largely valued maintaining interpersonal harmony, a strong Chinese cultural trait (Chen, 2008), and hence preferred not to acknowledge neuroticism.

Furthermore, in the process of interpretation, the participants also manifested stereotyping or generalising to some extent. Some participants stereotyped the expatriates just as they felt the expatriates also stereotyped the Chinese. However, from the perspective of sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Weick, et al., 2005), this is acceptable since the whole purpose of sensemaking is for the sensemaker to learn either lessens or experience from the unknown through the interaction.

Given this analysis of the participants' perceptions of the expatriates' personality traits, I next turn to elaborate on how the participants interpret the cultural differences relevant to communication styles.

4.2 Differences in communication styles

In addition to personality traits, cultural differences are also manifested through the expatriates' communicative disposition in the intercultural encounters from HCS's perspective. The data analysis shows that the theme "directness" emerges very strongly. Directness here means that the expatriates tended to express their points of view or feelings clearly and forthrightly in public. In other words, they preferred to convey their thoughts and ideas through explicit verbal messages. The other theme is quite the opposite: indirectness, meaning not to explicitly express the speakers' ideas. My thematic analysis shows that the expatriates' directness is manifested in at least the following three ways: directness in thinking logically, challenging authority, and promoting their performance, while their indirectness is mainly expressed in the case of disagreement.

4.2.1 Directness

As stated above, directness could be manifested in three ways. In the first place, in terms of thinking logically, some participants perceived that the expatriates' logic in their contact with others tended to involve linear thinking. They were inclined to focus on the facts and evidence and go straightforwardly to the aims. As Robert said,

> 他们会，相对来说思考的思维上的话，比较直接一点，就目标在那里，我就朝这个目标走，但是我们可能会绕比较多的弯子。(Robert)

In terms of the way of thinking, they are more direct than Chinese, which means that they go straightforward towards the point, while we probably will do it in a roundabout way. (Robert)

Robert's comment also indicated a contrast in ways to express points of view between the expatriates and Chinese people. Chinese people tend to avoid saying "no" directly in interpersonal communication. They usually indicate their disagreement in a more circumlocutory manner. Fred explained:

中国人更注重意会，有些东西不需要说明的，他可能会自己去领会，有些东西也很难说。换成一个老外的话，他会不停地问你为什么会这样。如果是中国人的话他就会适可而止，不会再问下去了。(Fred)

Chinese know that some things can only be perceived rather than expressed. The Chinese don't have to put everything on the table because some things cannot be explained with words. We won't ask for many details and will guess by ourselves. However, a foreigner will keep on asking why until he's satisfied with a clear answer. (Fred)

So, from the perspective of the Chinese staff, the expatriates tend to state their points of view clearly and explicitly. As Lucy mentioned, "they like to clarify: yes is yes, no is no" ("他们喜欢 clarify，可以就是可以，不行就是不行。"). This kind of directness is acceptable in saying "yes" but not in saying "no", since the latter might risk the interlocutor losing face from the Chinese perspective. As a result, if the participants communicated with them in this Chinese way, the expatriates would keep asking "why?" until they got the point. As Ted observed,

他们会有的时候就lost，不能get the point。真的！有的时候是这样。他说你表达的不就是这个意思嘛，干嘛还这样这样这样。其实你有时候为他考虑的一些东西在他来看就是多此一举的。(Ted)

They sometimes will be lost, and cannot get the point. Really, it is true sometimes. After understanding ultimately what we mean, they will be puzzled why we did not tell them directly. To them, it makes no sense to communicate in such an indirect way. (Ted)

Fred and Ted's accounts indicate two layers of meaning. First, the expatriates

preferred to express their thoughts or ideas in an explicit way. Second, they asked the interlocutors to express their thoughts and ideas straightaway, which indicated general differences in thinking logically between HCS and the expatriates. The accounts of the above participants can also be explained using Ting-Toomey's (1999) terms: linear logic in LCC vs. spiral logic in HCC. The examples illustrate that the expatriates' logical thinking tended to be linear, while HCS's logic seemed spiral.

Second, directness is also manifested in the expatriates' challenging authorities. Some participants noticed that expatriates who were lower in position also tended to express their views on public occasions such as meetings. As Barbara observed,

> 大家在开会的时候也是这样。如果这里有一个问题，外国的员工会直接说这个东西我不同意，或者我对这个东西有意见。但是中国员工很少很少会有这样的情况，即使在国外待的时间再长这个都是根深蒂固的。(Barbara)

> If there is something in a meeting with which one of the foreign staff doesn't agree, he/she will immediately express his/her disagreement or his/her own opinion. However, Chinese staff seldom act in that way no matter how long they have stayed abroad. They still find it difficult to challenge their deeply-rooted minds. (Barbara)

Chinese people are traditionally asked to listen to others such as elders and teachers (听话；*ting hua*) from the time that they are little children, and are not encouraged to challenge elders' ideas and thoughts (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Similarly, in organisational settings, Chinese people are used to listening to their superiors rather than expressing their own ideas directly, as Barbara mentioned. Furthermore, this kind of directness also appeared to challenge the organisation's rules. The expatriates like to put everything on the table even to the extent of disagreement with the organisation's rules. However, Chinese people rarely dare to formally criticize the organisation's rules. In the two episodes below Fred illustrated how different Chinese staff are from the expatriates in dealing with similar phenomena:

> 我们学校在发展的过程中，对外籍教师的工资待遇有一个调整，在这个调整过程中遇到了一些问题。有一些外籍教师对这个调整不满意，这是一件事情。还有就

是对中方员工的宿舍做过一些调整，有些人也不是非常满意。从类似的两件事的处理态度上有一些差别，外方员工对工资调整不满意，他们对他们的dean提出意见，然后dean展开沟通会，交流会。在会上对这个调整有不满的staff发表了自己的意见，Dean呢对这些意见一一解答，跟他们说了调整的背景。对中方员工宿舍调整，有些人不满，当然有一个人提出了自己不同的意见，但是大多数人他们没有意见。虽然他对整体事情不满意，他也会表达，但他表达的方式是私下跟其他同事表达，不是跟校方沟通，我觉得这两个事情上差异就出来了。(Fred)

Once, we adjusted the salaries of the foreign staff and caused some dissatisfaction. Similarly, we adjusted the accommodation of Chinese staff on campus once and caused some dissatisfaction, too. However, the ways they deal with similar events are quite different. The foreign staff presented their opinions to the Dean regarding their dissatisfaction with the income adjustment. Then, the Dean held a meeting in which the dissatisfied foreign staff expressed their opinions about the issue and the Dean answered their questions one by one, explaining the background to this income adjustment. In contrast, the Chinese staff, although they were not satisfied with the adjustment of their accommodation, did not present their opinion to the head, apart from one person. Rather, they complained among themselves instead of negotiating with the school. As far as the two events are concerned, the diversity is apparent. (Fred)

Fred further explained:

相对于中方员工来说，外方员工更注重自己的表达，沟通。(Fred)

Compared with Chinese staff, self-expression and communication is deemed very important by foreign staff. (Fred)

Directly expressing views, especially against authority or superiors, is not encouraged in Chinese society since it tends to be considered offending authorities and thereby putting the arguer into a disadvantageous position. The above episodes exemplify two types of communication styles: the expatriates' person-oriented communication style and HCS's status-oriented one (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998) .

The data show that this kind of directness manifested by the expatriates seemed not to embarrass the participants. Rather, some participants claimed that they appreciated and benefited from it. It usually made things simpler and also saved

time since they did not need to guess the interlocutor's real meaning, as Kelly reflected. On public occasions, such as in meetings, subordinates were allowed to freely express their opinions and even argue with senior staff. And when this happened, the participants did not feel that the senior staff were uncomfortable. Rather, as Kelly related, the atmosphere at the meeting was harmonious and any comment was welcome. As far as this point is concerned, Robert also agreed with Kelly. Furthermore, although most expatriates preferred to express their opinions directly, the way they expressed them was polite in the eyes of Herbert and many other participants, and hence is acceptable:

> 老外一般来说他们都会比较的，就是语气上，用词是会比较客气。但是他们的意见或者建议给出来的时候也是比较直接的，他的方式可以很礼貌。(Herbert)

> Foreigners, generally, are more polite in the use of tone and words. In other words, their views or recommendations come out more directly, but the manner is polite. (Herbert)

Nevertheless, not all the kinds of directness manifested by the expatriates are appreciated by the participants. For example, compared with HCS, some expatriates tended to unreservedly promote their performance and ideas in the workplace, which made them more aggressive from the perspective of HCS. This was exemplified by Jane. She mentioned that there were three colleagues in her office: two HCS and an expatriate. She noticed that she and her HCS colleague tended to take the foreign colleague's feelings into consideration when they reported to their common superior about work progress. For example, they preferred not to show their results to their superior if they felt the achievement of their foreign colleague at the same time was not as high as theirs. In other words, they were afraid to make their foreign colleague lose face and suffer embarrassment. However, they noticed that their expatriate colleague was keen to promote her own achievements and the strong contribution she had made to the university if she did the same things.

Jane felt that the expatriate's behaviour could have the effect of causing the others to lose face and thereby destroy the harmonious atmosphere of the team. Hence,

she admitted that she and her Chinese colleague did not behave like her expatriate colleague in terms of reporting their performances, at least when other colleagues were around. This episode indicates the differences between Jane and her Chinese colleague and their expatriate counterpart in showing their efforts and performance: the former tended to adopt a self-effacement style in HCC and the latter seemed to show a self-enhancement style in LCC (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

4.2.2 Indirectness

Although the expatriates were generally direct from HCS's perspective, the participants also noticed that not all expatriates tended to explicitly express their real points of view, especially avoiding negative responses like "No", or "I disagree with you", or "I cannot do it". Sometimes, they used a mild and roundabout way to express their points. As Tom remarked,

> 中国人含蓄其实老外也含蓄的。他在跟你说一个事情的时候，说你做的不好，他不会直接说出来，他会绕着弯子怎么怎么样……然后but这个事情是不是可以这么做呢？这是一种相对来说比较polite的方式。其实我觉得跟西方人的一种就是说绅士风度还是有关系的，就是说大家互相还是有一种面子或者说有一个space。(Tom)

> Chinese is implicit. Actually, so are foreigners. Similarly, a foreigner prefers not to express his real views directly if he thinks you did not do something quite well. Rather, he tends to say something good or unrelated first, then followed by "but, it might be better if it was done in another way" to express his real meaning. This may be because of the gentlemen tradition of Western people. That is, there exists a kind of face or space for each other. (Tom)

Ted also encountered a Canadian expatriate who would particularly take another's face into consideration when expressing his views, which was different from his initial feeling about the expatriates. In addition, in an observation by Jane, the way her foreign colleague would say "no" also varied from occasion to occasion and person to person. She mentioned that her colleague would say "no" directly to colleagues on some occasions while making a negative response indirectly on other occasions. But in comparison with the Chinese (for example herself), she admitted that she did not know how to refuse in the latter case. Tom also

mentioned that although the expatriates sometimes used questions such as "how about...?" instead of directly saying "no", the interlocutor can get the point easily.

4.2.3 Conclusions

This section has elaborated on the expatriates' communicational dispositions from HCS's perspective. The expatriates were generally perceived as being more direct in expressing their ideas and thoughts compared with HCS. In the eyes of the participants, the expatriates tended to verbally express their views in a manner that was considerably straightforward and explicit. It seems that they preferred to tackle issues explicitly and head on. Nevertheless, some expatriates also manifested indirectness, for example, in being able to express negative responses in an implicit way.

To conclude, the participants generally used the word "direct" to describe the expatriates' behaviour in intercultural communication. From the participants' perspective, the expatriates tended to express their points of view explicitly on public occasions. In addition, the aspects of directness manifested by the expatriates correspond to some characteristics of Ting-Toomey's (1999) LCC framework, while HCS's communicative styles could be subsumed within her HCC one. Nevertheless, the analysis also shows that some expatriates were able to use an indirect way of expressing their views in order to save the interlocutor's face, depending on the occasion and the interlocutor. This implies that the indirect communication style is not exclusive to one particular culture, such as China, as assumed in Ting-Toomey's (1999) model.

4.3 Differences in values

The previous sections have discussed the participants' perceptions of the differences between themselves and the expatriates regarding personality traits and communication styles. This section deals with the differences in cultural values noticed and interpreted by the participants. The data analysis shows that the participants' perceptions of differences in cultural values encompass various features. Specifically, I first discuss the different values regarding the life and

work habits of the expatriates. Next, I illustrate the expatriates' concern for privacy in section 4.3.2. Section 4.3.3 focuses on the expatriates' values in communicating equally among members of the organisation. In section 4.3.4, I look at the expatriates' values in work-oriented relationships, and finally conclude this section in section 4.3.5.

4.3.1 Values in life/work habits and customs

This subsection discusses the differences in life/work habits and customs between HCS and expatriates from the perspective of the participants. Three key themes emerged. First, in daily life, the participants noticed that the expatriates liked going to the pub in their spare time. Second, when going out socially the expatriates usually paid for themselves, even when with friends. And third, in the workplace, they tended to confirm things by email when they had already reached a consensus orally.

Liking going to the pub

In terms of differences in life habits between the expatriates and HCS, the expatriates' liking for going to the pub emerged. Some male participants used a well-known slang expression, "泡吧" (*pao ba*), to describe it. "Dipping oneself in some place" in Chinese means "spending much time or immersing oneself in a certain place" (Wang, 2010a, p. 175). Hence, "dipping bar" (泡吧; *pao ba*) means spending much time in a bar. Some participants (such as Joseph, Kelly and Jane) noticed that expatriates liked going to a bar in the evenings. For instance, Joseph noted that the expatriates often went to "dipping bar" (泡吧; *pao ba*) at the end of an event, whereas playing cards, doing Karaoke and having dinner parties are much more popular in Chinese contemporary society. In terms of this diversity, Herbert gave a representative conclusion. He thought that it was not so much fun to spend the whole night in a club with only one bottle of beer, compared with other recreational activities which many Chinese like:

> 可能生活习惯的问题，我觉得我们这边很多喜欢的东西老外不见得喜欢。比如说唱卡拉OK呀，或者说是中国人喜欢什么玩牌这样，那这种老外是没法理解。然他

们喜欢的东西很多我看起来也会比较无聊。在（国外）念书的时候，我真的觉得酒吧没有什么意思：就在那里拿一瓶啤酒喝一晚上，相互聊天这样子也没怎么样……他们所谓的social life其实就是酒吧。(Herbert)

Probably owing to different customs and habits, foreigners may not like many recreational activities that Chinese love. For instance, they cannot understand why Chinese like to sing Karaoke and play cards. However, many of the things they like are fairly boring for us. When I was studying abroad, I really felt that it was not interesting to spend time in the bar at night with one bottle of beer, and do nothing except chat with each other…Their so-called social life is actually going to a bar. (Herbert)

Compared with "dipping bar", playing cards, Karaoke and dinner parties are much more collective. People in a bar can do whatever they like, such as drinking alone or chatting with friends, while people playing cards, doing Karaoke and having dinner parties need to look after each other since all these are collective activities. Furthermore, according to Yum (1988), personal and public relationships often overlap under the impact of Confucian principles. Hence, Chinese people tend to maintain and develop interpersonal relationships through these types of entertainment.

Paying for themselves on collective occasions

In addition to "dipping bar", the participants also noticed that the expatriates usually paid for themselves, even when "hanging out" with their friends, which surprised the participants at the beginning. In the course of the interviews, some participants used the English phrases "go Dutch" or "AA" to describe this phenomenon. As Ellen mentioned,

[外国人]邀你去吃饭，就是AA制的这种，不会说是请你吃饭。(而)我们中国人的话，邀请你一起吃饭就是由我来付费这样一个意思。(Ellen)

If [foreigner] invites you for a meal, he/she means AA rather than paying for you. However，when we Chinese invite you for a meal, it indicates that we will pay for the meal. (Ellen)

In terms of this custom of the expatriates, Barbara also mentioned that it was

normal to "go Dutch" even with senior or superior staff at UNNC. In the eyes of Lin, this was the biggest cultural diversity between Chinese and Western people. The following conversation between Rebecca and myself shows Rebecca's attitude to it:

被采访者：……我们特别特别受不了跟他们一起去吃饭……包括星期五我们开的这个Party，全部都是'go Dutch'，连零钱都算得很清楚，我最受不了这个。这个其实挺好的。

采访者：也是一种文化差异。

被采访者：就是文化差异。最大的一个文化差异，你觉得很怪。中国人就是大家轮流请客。

采访者：外方如果没有约定就是我邀请的话，一般都是go Dutch。

被采访者：这个就是我最受不了的。

Rebecca: …I cannot tolerate their 'going Dutch' when going out for a dinner party. Even the change is shared out equally between them. Actually it is quite good.

Interviewer: It is a cultural difference as well.

Rebecca: It is one of the biggest cultural differences. It is strange to Chinese. Chinese prefer to pay the bill in turn.

Interviewer: They usually go Dutch unless an agreement is reached beforehand.

Rebecca: I cannot tolerate this at all.

Similarly, Robert also felt that it was to some extent quite ruthless, especially when socialising with friends. Following Chinese custom, he thought that

……假如说我们是朋友，今天我请你吃饭的话，那很明显你下一次自动就会[回请]……那这个也是就是说保证这个朋友的一个友谊这么持续的一个有效的方式。但是可能外国人来说的话，就出去按什么都AA。但是用我们的文化来说的话，就是挺无情的在一定程度上。为什么要分得这么清楚，连一分一毛都要分的很清楚？(Robert)

…If I invite you for a meal today as we are friends, obviously next time you will do the same thing in return….It is an effective way to maintain friendship. But for foreigners, they prefer to go Dutch for everything, which is to some extent quite ruthless from the perspective of our culture. Why should we calculate so precisely, even one pence or one coin? (Robert)

It can be seen from the above accounts that the expatriates seem to take "going Dutch" for granted but this is not popular among HCS. Yum (1988) uses Confucian principles to explain this difference. From the perspective of Confucian long-term asymmetrical reciprocity in interpersonal relationships, people do not calculate immediate giving or receiving. Rather, they pursue long-term interdependence and reciprocity. Under the impact of this principle, Chinese people are used to taking turns to pay for a meal and entertainment with friends rather than "go Dutch". Chinese people rarely pay for themselves at collective events. At most, the event organiser will ask the attendees to pay the average cost before or after. According to Confucian principles, discussing money, especially with friends on public occasions, tends to result in losing face and damaging a harmonious atmosphere and hence is not encouraged.

Using email for confirmation

In addition to the above differences manifested in daily life, one habit in the workplace was noticeable from the perspective of the participants. It was that the expatriates usually confirmed the result via email after a discussion or meeting. As Kelly remarked,

其实我觉得大部分那些老外还是会就是说发电子邮件为主，我觉得这可能也是他们沟通的一种习惯……比如说我跟老外为某一件事情有一个discussion或者一种meeting，稍后的话为了confirm双方之间的观点，就像你现在做的一样，我们会通过email用文字confirm下来。(Kelly)

According to my experience, foreigners are used to communicating by email…For instance, if a foreign member of staff and I have a discussion or meeting on something, then we confirm the viewpoints of both parties by email later. (Kelly)

This custom was also noticed by Veronica:

他们比较注重写，他们比较喜欢有一个record下来。就是说不管开会也好，还是一件事情的处理，他们都喜欢用文字来记录一下东西……confirm一下，然后也是有利于比如说几年之后回顾。(Veronica)

They pay more attention to the written form, in other words, they prefer to record something after an event such as a meeting or sorting an issue out. It means that they tend to make a record for later confirmation and future review after some years. (Veronica)

Again, this can be explained by Confucian principles. Truthfulness is regarded as one of the traditional Chinese virtues and basic social ethics. Under the constraints of this virtue, Chinese embrace *yan chu bi xing* (言出必行; so said, so do) and *yi yan jiu ding* (一言九鼎; one word is as heavy as nine tripods). Hence, Chinese traditional culture does not encourage people to speak a lot on public occasions but you need to stand by your promise. Traditionally, Chinese people are not used to asking for written confirmation in the workplace, unless in very formal circumstances such as meetings. Even in some official circumstances, it is not abnormal for official instructions to be verbally relayed by officials of a higher level to those of a lower level. Reflecting on this habit brought by the expatriates, some participants acknowledged that it was beneficial to avoid misunderstanding in interpersonal encounters. In addition, as Veronica mentioned, it was also helpful for reviewing.

To sum up, "liking going to the pub" and "going Dutch" were common in daily life among the expatriates from the perspective of HCS. Chinese people were not used to these habits although one person admitted that she had been used to the latter. In addition, the participants noticed that the expatriates used email to confirm things which had been agreed upon.

4.3.2 Concern for personal space

The previous sub-section discussed differences between the expatriates and Chinese in habits regarding life and work. This sub-section deals with the expatriates' concern for personal space, with particular reference to environmental and psychological boundaries. The former relates to domestic issues while the

latter emphasizes a concern for privacy.

Environmental boundaries are defined as "the claimed sense of space and emotional attachment we share with others in our community" (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 217). In the eyes of Ted, the expatriates regarded their homes as a very private world. Thus, they were consequently very selective as to whom they invited into their homes. Valerie mentioned that she usually did extra things for the expatriates such as voluntarily accompanying them to a hospital in her time off, booking flight tickets for them and so forth. Therefore, she had opportunities to be invited to an expatriate's home. According to her interpretation,

> 其实有的时候我觉得他们，像邀请我的时候是怀着一种很感谢我的这种心情，就是帮了他们很多很多忙，然后希望邀请我去他们家作客……在国外的人来说，邀请你到他们家里去，应该是属于非常非常的，是比较亲密的这样一个关系才会邀请你。(Valerie)

> Actually, sometimes they invited me to their houses with gratitude as I did a lot of favours for them. Normally, foreigners prefer not to invite people to their homes unless they are very close to them. (Valerie)

In Barbara's eyes, the expatriates preferred not to contact colleagues in off-duty time since she felt that the expatriates liked to have their own personal space. Therefore, they tended to have lunch or afternoon tea with colleagues rather than meeting them in their spare time such as after 5.00pm (off-work time) or evenings.

Another concern relevant to personal space is psychological or intrapersonal space, which can be defined as "the need for information privacy or psychological silence between the self and others" (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 218). In mentioning the expatriates' concern for intrapersonal space, the participants tend to use the word "privacy"(隐私; *yin si*) to describe it. For instance,

> 他们是非常注重自己隐私的。(Barbara)

> They are greatly concerned with their privacy. (Barbara)

As far as this point is concerned, the participants' common feeling was that the expatriates were unwilling to discuss matters of family life with them, even though they were close friends with each other and even on informal occasions. Furthermore, the expatriates were not only concerned with their own privacy, but also protected their students' privacy. From the perspective of the expatriates, Joseph further explained, every student's privacy was absolutely inviolable, which was exemplified through a small incident by Joseph:

> 一个学生家长想了解他们自己家里孩子的学习成绩这些情况，打电话到faculty office问他，他家孩子的成绩多少。Faculty officer说："没有学生本人的授权，我们是不能给你公布这个成绩的。" 所以那个学生家长就很恼火，这边就说是不能给。(Joseph)

> A student's parent once called UNNC faculty office, enquiring for some information about his son's academic performance, such as his marks for his courses, (which is normal and taken for granted in the context of China). But the faculty office told him that without the student's permission, the school had no right to disclose his performance record to anyone, including his parents. Although this enraged the parent, the faculty office did not make a concession. (Joseph)

Normally, Chinese people are perceived as lacking a sense of privacy, according to Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005). These authors mention that the Chinese phrase "privacy"(隐私; *yin si*) usually has a negative connotation such as secrecy and selfishness. It is not a taboo to talk about colleagues' personal affairs or family members on public occasions in Chinese society. Sometimes, it is a way to express concern between colleagues, especially from superiors to subordinates. Nevertheless, in the course of the interviews, I did not feel that the participants commented negatively on the expatriates' concern for privacy. Rather, they consciously avoided some topics relevant to personal affairs so as not to offend the other's privacy in an intercultural encounter.

4.3.3 Communicating equally between superiors and subordinates

In addition to differences in life/work habits and customs and concern for privacy, the participants also noticed that the expatriates valued equality in interpersonal

communication. A common perception amongst the participants was that the expatriates had little sense of hierarchy. On the one hand, subordinates could freely express their own views in front of their superiors whether in public or in private. On the other hand, superiors tended to explain their standpoints if they disagreed with the comments of their subordinates. From the perspective of the participants, they had equal rights.

This perception was quite common among the participants. In the course of interviewing, the participants tended to use expressions such as "equal", "little sense of hierarchy" and "patient" to describe their feeling when communicating with senior expatriates. Generally, the participants felt equal in their interaction with the expatriates even though they were seniors, as exemplified in the following accounts:

> 比如说像我们这个环境，上下级就是，当然工作当中你有你的line manager，或者你的director。但真正大家交流还是都还是很平等的一个状态。(Mary)

> For example, at UNNC, communication between superiors and staff is equal. Superiors are referred to as to your line manager or your director in your work. (Mary)

> 当你跟英国的这几位领导相处过之后，你就觉得很多时候他们是以很朋友的，很平等的那种姿态来跟你交流一些问题。(Jane)

> If you have contacts with the British bosses, you'll find that in most cases they will communicate with you equally and friendlily. (Jane)

In the eyes of HCS, senior expatriates were more polite and patient in interaction with subordinates, which made them feel very comfortable. Herbert commented,

> 他在领导的位置并没有说用一种领导的姿态来去跟，命令一些或者说非常tough的让你去做一些事情…跟他们交流，通常起来我觉得他们至少没有一个人表现出来说因为很忙而体现出不耐烦，这样是没有的，都是很有耐心的。只要你去找他，因为工作当中不可能所有的事情都有预约嘛，有的时候是比较急的事情，他们只要在，都会比较耐心。(Herbert)

> As a leader, he never took a commanding way nor a tough attitude to ask us to do

things. Usually, I can feel that they are very patient when I talk with them. And in my impression, none of the bosses ever showed a kind of impatience because of being busy. As long as they are in the office, they will communicate with you patiently if you drop by. They understand that not all meetings can be arranged in advance – emergencies happen. (Herbert)

In addition to politeness and patience, some senior expatriates were ready to listen to their subordinates' views, which made the participants very comfortable. Some participants used a Chinese phrase *qing ting* (倾听; listen attentively) to describe their superiors listening to their viewpoints before making a decision. For instance, Kelly mentioned that her superior was always prepared to listen to his subordinates' opinions. He would adopt the best suggestion after discussion, regardless of whether it was his own or from a subordinate. Similarly, Veronica also recalled the process of her superior's decision-making. First, he would ask her a lot of questions. And then, he would discuss with her after sharing his viewpoint. Finally the decision was taken. It seems that the senior expatriates always gave their subordinates an opportunity to express their opinions. Furthermore, on public occasions such as at a meeting, subordinates were allowed to express their opinions freely and even argue with senior staff. And when that happened the participants did not feel that the senior staff felt uncomfortable. Rather, as Kelly, Tom and Robert said, the atmosphere at meetings was much more harmonious and any comment was welcome.

Heavily influenced by Confucian doctrine, Chinese people of low status tend to take obedience, respect, and submission to their superiors for granted. Hence, when their superiors proposed listening to their subordinates' viewpoints, they were impressed and appreciative. What their superiors did challenged the traditional cultural values of China: "ordering relationships by status and observing this order (*zun bei you xu*; 尊卑有序)" (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 18). From the participants' perspective, it was not easy for a superior to be ready to listen to and accept subordinates' views.

Furthermore, the above accounts show that, generally, the participants had developed a sense of feeling equal in the course of their interaction with the

expatriates, especially their superiors. More specifically, the senior expatriates allowed their subordinates to freely express their opinions including arguing, challenging and even contradicting their viewpoints both on public or private occasions. Furthermore, they seldom ordered their subordinates to do something. Along the dimension of Hofstede's power distance (2005), the equality in interaction between superiors and subordinates at UNNC probably provided the best evidence of the expatriates subscribing to small power distance. Nevertheless, this kind of organisational environment was "not real in the context of Chinese society" as Barbara reflected. Tom also expressed a similar consideration. Their reflections on the above phenomenon to a large extent shows that power still plays an important role in Chinese contemporary society, at least in this study.

4.3.4 Work-oriented interpersonal relationships

Along with equality in interactions, work-oriented relationships between colleagues were another apparent difference from the perspective of the participants. A work-oriented relationship here refers to the expatriates' concern for work *per se* rather than interpersonal *guan xi* in the workplace.

The expatriates were inclined to focus on things rather than relationships, which gave the participants an impression that their interpersonal relationships were comparatively simple. Hence, in the participants' eyes, they placed an emphasis on responsibility rather than relationships and focused on things instead of individuals in the workplace. For instance, they adopted the same standard to deal with work no matter what the relationship between them and the others was. The Chinese phrases "就事论事"(*jiu shi lun shi*; matter of fact) and "对事不对人" (*dui shi bu dui ren*; focusing on things rather than person) were used at least 10 times by participants in their accounts of the expatriates' attitude to interpersonal relationships. The accounts by William and Ted sum up how the expatriates dealt with work and relationships:

> 在国外[人]他们的思考，就是看法里面主要强调的职责、责任 [轻人际关系]，也就是说你自身的责任感。他们在思考问题的时候，不是想着可能我们之间是否熟，你应该快帮我做。(William)

In the view of foreigners, they mainly focus on duty and responsibility [not relationship]: this means personal responsibility. They do not take the extent of interpersonal acquaintance into consideration in a work situation. (William)

外国人即使关系很好的话，他只是在语言上更礼貌一些或者说更随便一些更随意一些，但是事儿上他不会说因为我们俩是朋友你可不可以这样做[一个例外来处理]？在他们世界里没有这种double standard概念在。(Ted)

A friendship, i.e. a good relationship, between them does not mean there could be an exception while encountering rules about dealing with work. It merely means the communication between them is more friendly, and more casual. There is no sense of double standard in their world. (Ted)

In addition, the expatriates tended not to combine issues with people. In other words, even when complaining about something to someone, they sometimes would claim that they were just not satisfied with the thing rather than with the interlocutor.

By contrast, Chinese society is perceived as relation-oriented and Chinese people place much more weight on maintaining relationships (Yum, 1988). *Guan xi* plays a large role in the course of Chinese communication, according to some researchers (Hofstede, et al., 2005). For instance, Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) state that maintaining relationships is regarded as the primary function of communication, while Chen (2008) argues that the achievement of harmony and competence in Chinese communication depends on knowing how to make a good *guan xi*. The data in this study also show that HCS pay more attention to the role relationships play in cooperation with the expatriates, which was different from the expatriates. As John concluded,

......中国人一个人情的这种观点挺重要。可能做事情的时候，有时候会考虑比较多的是人和人之间的关系。事情的结果怎么样，有时候反而是其次了。但是老外的话，我觉得基本上老外都把事情放在第一位的，比较直接。(John)

…Chinese people pay more attention to *ren qing*. Hence, they tend to take more care of *guan xi* rather than solve the problem. As for the result of the issue, sometimes this is in secondary position. But foreigners usually put "problem solving" in first position.

Therefore, their way of dealing with work is more direct. (John)

Here, John mentioned an important concept, *ren qing* （人情）, in Chinese interpersonal relations (*guan xi*). According to Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998), *ren qing* implies three layers of meaning: 1) human feelings such as happiness, anger, sorrow and joy; 2) interpersonal resources that can be used as gifts to others in interpersonal transactions; and 3) social norms regulating Chinese personal relationships. For example, if I help someone who is in trouble, I give the person *ren qing*, while the person owes me *ren qing* and hence is expected to repay (回报; *hui bao*) me in the future in a similar way. Thus, interpersonal relationships (*guan xi*) are maintained and developed through this kind of reciprocity. Likewise, a person's social network (*guan xi* network) can be established and widened through giving and taking *ren qing*.

The principles of *guan xi* are also applied in the workplace in the Chinese society. The impact of *guan xi* on Chinese business has been discussed in cross-culture research. For instance, Yum (1988) claims that personal and public relationships appear to overlap under the impact of Confucian social reciprocity. In other words, a warm personal relationship can help to develop and maintain a work relationship. Jacobs, Belschak and Krug (2004) treat *guan xi* as social capital which can exert a profound influence on business activities in the Chinese society. In his account, John reflected that *guan xi* still played an important role in current Chinese society, at least among the people he knew.

Nevertheless, the expatriates' emphasis on things and de-emphasis on interpersonal relationships did impress the participants who, mentioning *guan xi,* appeared to be quite comfortable with a simple relationship with the expatriates. For example:

他们会比较简单…可能他们的关系更加单纯一点，中国的关系更加稍微复杂一点。 (Joseph)

They tend to be simpler…maybe their relationships are much purer, while Chinese *guan xi* is much more complicated. (Joseph)

中国人比较复杂…中国人很多时候会带着目的去结交朋友，去交流。那么外国人在这一点上会来得简单一些，他喜欢你就喜欢你，不喜欢你就不喜欢你。(Barbara)

Chinese people are more complicated…They tend to purposely look for friends and keep in touch with them, while foreigners are simpler in terms of this perspective, that is, if he likes you, he'll try to make friends with you, while if he does not like you, he'll not make friends with you. (Barbara)

One exception to this view came from an observation by Barbara. She remarked,

当外国人在中国这边生活很多年以后，你可以发现在我们这边的外籍，有时候搞关系搞的比中国员工还要厉害。他们知道的那一系列的communication的东西比我们要知道得多得多，因为他们也被中国的文化同化了。(Barbara)

After having been living in China for many years, the foreigners here sometimes turn out to be even better at building connections than Chinese people. They learn the Chinese way of communication to build *guan xi*, understanding it even better than the locals, because they have assimilated Chinese culture. (Barbara)

搞关系 (*gao guan xi*; building connections) is a negative phrase in Chinese, and is used to describe someone who is good at achieving his ends through relationships rather than normal approaches. Therefore, finding that some expatriates were good at making relationships, Barbara prefers to believe that "they have assimilated Chinese culture". Her account at least implied that interpersonal relationships were still significant in the Chinese society from the other angle.

To conclude, the data analysis shows that the participants perceived the expatriates as generally focused on work *per se* more than *guan xi* in the workplace (with a few exceptions). In making such a comparison, the participants also mentioned that *guan xi* still plays an important role in current Chinese society, at least from the perspective of the participants in this study. Meanwhile, the participants generally appreciated the simpler inter-personal relationships prevalent amongst themselves and the expatriates in the workplace.

4.3.5 Conclusions

This section has explored different values between the expatriates and HCS from HCS's perspective. The participants make sense of these differences in terms of various types of behaviour. In daily life, the expatriates are in favour of going to the pub during their spare time and are used to "going Dutch" even when socialising with friends. In the workplace, they are inclined to use email to confirm things which have been agreed on. Furthermore, they are concerned with privacy, treating home as a very private place, and seldom inviting acquaintances to their homes.

In addition, almost all the participants acknowledged that they felt equal in communicating with the expatriates. They were allowed to freely express their points of view on public occasions and senior expatriates were also ready to listen to their subordinates' views. Furthermore, the participants also perceived that the expatriates' interpersonal relationships were generally much simpler compared to those of Chinese. The expatriates tended to focus on work rather than on relationships between colleagues, which made the participants very comfortable.

Meanwhile, in making sense of the expatriates' differences in cultural values, the participants made a comparison, consciously or unconsciously, with values taken for granted in Chinese society. According to Tajfel's (1981) identity theory, in perceiving out-group members, individual social identity is activated. The findings in this section suggests that Confucian principles such as *guan xi* and social order still influence the participants' perceptions of cultural others. However, as stated in Chapter 2, in making social comparison and categorization, people tend to exaggerate the differences between intergroups (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Again, as discussed in section 4.1.3, the participants' interpretations of different values could be based on stereotyping and generalising. Additionally, the findings in this study also show that the expatriates generally focused on work *per se* rather than *guan xi* in the workplace, but exceptions also existed. Some expatriates appeared to show concern for *guan xi* more than the ordinary Chinese staff at UNNC.

Chapter summary

This chapter has aimed to answer the first research question: how the participants make sense of cultural differences within the specific context of UNNC. The data analysis indicates that the participants constructed cultural differences from three perspectives: differences in personality traits, communication styles, and cultural values, and these have been presented in sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3, respectively.

In terms of personality traits, FFM can largely interpret the participants' perceptions of the expatriates' personality structure. Generally, it reveals the expatriates' attitudes towards new cultures and ideas (such as openness), work (such as conscientiousness) and cultural others (such as extroversion, agreeableness and emotional stability/neuroticism). Nevertheless, FFM cannot explain all the data relevant to personality traits. In addition to perceptions of personality traits, the participants also expressed their own feelings towards these traits. For instance, they acknowledged the expatriates' openness, agreeableness and part of directness, but struggled to accept their neuroticism.

In terms of communication styles, the findings show that the two themes of directness and indirectness can explain the expatriates' communication styles. They reveal the expatriates' communicative attitudes from the perspective of HCS.

Apart from differences in personality traits, the participants also were aware of differences in cultural values between themselves and the expatriates. They noticed that the expatriates consciously or unconsciously manifested certain traits. For example, they generally like to go to the pub in their spare time and "go Dutch" on collective occasions in daily life, although most of the participants did not like these customs. The expatriates are also used to confirming things via email. They are concerned about privacy and seldom referred to themselves in intercultural encounters. Furthermore, the expatriates appear to treat every member of staff equally, and thus, in the view of all but one of the participants,

their interrelationships are much simpler than those of their Chinese counterparts. Simultaneously, the participants were impressed by the comparatively equal rights and simple interpersonal relationships of the expatriates.

As stated in chapter 2, sensemaking is triggered by uncertainty and ambiguity, and cultural differences are assumed to have the most potential to give rise to uncertainty and ambiguity in intercultural encounters (Mughan & O'Shea, 2010). When cultural differences are noticed, people make sense of these differences in order to offer plausible speculations on the resulting reactions from the perspective of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). These extracted differences are regarded as a set of cues which serve as points of reference to evoke action, which will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

Furthermore, encouraging the participants to articulate their personal perceptions of cultural differences allows them to reflect on their own groups' (here the Chinese staff) personality traits, communication styles, attitudes, behaviours and cultural values in general, which might in turn contribute to the overall understanding of the process of sensemaking in the context of the Sino-foreign cooperative higher education institution. Accordingly, this chapter has also analysed how the participants' own values and experiences impacted their perceptions of the expatriates. The findings show that Confucian values tended to play a significant role in the participants' perceptions of the expatriates. In addition, the social structure of Chinese contemporary society also influenced the participants' perceptions. Put together, the participants' interpretations of cultural differences between them and the expatriates were subject to many factors, such as their personal experiences, the social context and their cultural frames of reference.

The findings in this chapter show that individuals' constructions of cultural differences in intercultural interaction are not only concerned with differences in cultural values and communication styles, but also with the interlocutors' personalities. The latter tend to be neglected in intercultural studies. As such, the data analysis in this study lends support to Bird and Osland's (2005-2006) suggestion that attention should also be paid to individual personality, in addition

to cultural values.

In summary, this chapter has attempted to explore how the participants made sense of cultural differences within the specific context of UNNC for two purposes. First, I aimed to probe the kinds of cultural differences that were noticed and extracted by the participants and then became frameworks for the participants' subsequent interaction with the expatriates at UNNC. Second, encouraging the participants to make social categorizations and comparison between themselves and cultural others also exposed their own cultural frames of reference in their intercultural encounters. Both of these two points are important for understanding how HCS interact with culturally different others. Given their perceptions and sensemaking of the key cultural differences between the two groups, the next chapter will focus on how the participants interact with the expatriates at UNNC.

Chapter 5 HCS's responses to cultural differences

The preceding chapter examined how the participants constructed cultural differences in their intercultural encounters with the expatriate staff at UNNC. These perceptions provide understandings of or possible reasons why HCS adopt certain communication behaviours and styles when interacting with the expatriates. With this in mind, this chapter is concerned with the following core questions. How do HCS respond to cultural differences in intercultural encounters? What factors can impede the process of (inter)cultural sensemaking? How does (inter)cultural sensemaking facilitate the development of intercultural competence? In other words, this chapter deals with the action part of Bird and Osland's (2005-2006) cultural sensemaking model.

As discussed in chapter 2, Osland, Bird and Gundersen (2007) identify three types of responses when people encounter uncertain and ambiguous events in intercultural situations: fight-or-flight, acceptance and intercultural sensemaking. The authors further argue that the former two can be regarded as negative while only the third one is a positive response. However, they also admit that the above assumptions were mainly based on literature and pilot interviews, and hence do not have empirical evidence to support their arguments. In addition, the authors only present a theoretical model and do not discuss in depth the factors which cause negative responses such as fight-or-flight and acceptance. In terms of the positive response – intercultural sensemaking – neither do they explore the processes involved in detail. Therefore, the analysis of the findings in this chapter aims to explore the extent to which the emergent themes align with the three concepts identified in Osland, et al.'s (2007) model, and the extent to which there is any relationship between intercultural sensemaking and intercultural competence. In addition, the factors that might influence the participants' engagement in intercultural sensemaking are investigated.

The chapter starts by drawing on Osland, et al.'s (2007) model to analyse HCS's responses to cultural differences. It also attempts to explore the factors hindering

cultural sensemaking and the processes of intercultural sensemaking in great detail. After that, it examines how sensemaking facilitates the development of intercultural competence by drawing on Glaser et al.'s (2007) model. Hence, the chapter is divided into three sections. Section 5.1 explores negative responses to cultural differences and possible causes. Section 5.2 identifies the processes of intercultural sensemaking. Finally, section 5.3 explores the development of intercultural competence in the course of intercultural sensemaking.

5.1 Negative responses towards cultural differences and their causes

This section looks at the participants' negative responses towards cultural differences in section 5.1.1 and the possible causes of them in section 5.1.2. The two types of negative responses – fight-or-flight and acceptance – identified by Osland et al. (2007) can be identified in my data. According to Osland et al. (2007), they are negative since the former represents an ethnocentric view of cultural differences while the latter implies passive adaptation to the expectations of people in another culture without seeking to understand cultural differences. However, the authors do not explore the causes leading to these two types of response. Five themes emerge from the data in the present study. They are lack of language proficiency, lower self-esteem, lack of similarity, lack of availability, and perceived communication difficulties with expatriates.

5.1.1 The negative responses

The data analysis shows two types of negative responses towards cultural differences: fight-flight and acceptance, which are elaborated on in the following.

Fight-or-flight responses

According to Osland et al. (2007), the fight response is "imposing one's own meaning on the situation and refusing to consider another perspective", while the flight response means "a withdrawal from the other culture – isolating oneself from contact" (p. 22). The manifestations of a fight response in this study came in the form of some participants' insistence on their own cultural frame of reference

in intercultural encounters, despite admitting the existence of cultural differences. For example, both Mary and Mike considered that they did not need to accommodate themselves to the expatriates because they were in China – their own country. Instead, the expatriates should adapt to them. And Jennifer reflected:

毕竟我是在中国，我就是不需要太去适应他们的。(Jennifer)

After all, I am in China and hence do not need to adapt to them. (Jennifer)

The flight responses in this study were manifested in two ways. On the one hand, a number of the participants claimed that they generally did not take the initiative in contacting the expatriates and their contact tended to be confined to the demands of the workplace. On the other hand, many participants appeared to show an unwillingness to socialize with the expatriates in daily life. In other words, quite a number of the participants did not appear to be interested in the expatriates' experiences in daily life and were therefore unwilling to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with them beyond work.

Acceptance

An acceptance response means a passive approach, neither rejecting nor attempting to understand cultural differences (Osland, et al., 2007). The manifestation of the acceptance response in this study is a passive compliance with the ways in which the expatriates thought and behaved, albeit reluctantly. For example, some participants tended to "go Dutch" when socialising with the expatriates despite the fact that they did not approve of this habit.

The data relevant to the participants' negative responses can be subsumed into the above two types. I do not find any other negative responses towards cultural differences on the part of my participants in the data. Accordingly, the study supports Osland et al.'s (2007) classification of people's responses to an unknown event (cultural differences here) in intercultural encounters. It can be seen from the above two types of response that there are at least two common factors operating when people are in the above two situations. One is that their cultural positions do not change, and the other is that they do not seek to understand the

other's perspectives. Furthermore, negative emotions and misattributions about the other culture or negative judgments towards cultural differences usually accompany these types of response. For example, Mike had a very strong negative emotion toward intercultural contact. He confessed that he once made an active effort to communicate with people from other cultures, but after a period of enthusiasm, excitement and desire, he had given up because he felt that people from diverse cultures were reluctant to integrate. As he said,

有过一段时间的热情、兴奋以及抱有希望，我现在觉得作出这些努力尝试之后，得出这样的一个结论：结局是不可能的。所以干脆放弃吧，我是属于绝望的，我觉得最终是很难融合在一块的。(Mike)

After a period of enthusiasm, excitement, having hope and making an effort, I draw the conclusion that [intercultural communication] is impossible. So I have given up entirely. I despair because I feel that it is hard for [people from diverse cultures] to eventually be integrated. (Mike)

In seeking the causes, Mike declared that cultural differences were the biggest barrier. His experience offered evidence for some researchers' findings that people tended to attribute their unsuccessful intercultural experience to cultural differences (e.g. Morosini, Shane, & Singh, 1998; Vaara, 2000).

In addition to the above emotional responses, some participants treated the intercultural contact at UNNC as work-related and did not have the desire to establish a social network as Chinese people usually did. Hence, they were not interested in keeping in touch with the expatriates beyond work. For example, Tom mentioned that he was still moving in Chinese circles after work.

In intercultural encounters, these types of subjective unwillingness are not conducive to developing intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). Hence, it is meaningful to explore the reasons behind these phenomena. The data show that numerous factors could affect the participants' unwillingness to engage with the expatriates. They stem from three sources: the HCS themselves, the expatriates, and the social contexts in which the communication happens. In the following subsection, I will discuss these in detail.

5.1.2 The hindrances

The data show that a number of factors complicated intercultural communication from the perspective of HCS. They are lack of language proficiency, lower self-esteem, lack of similarity, lack of availability, and perceived communication difficulties.

Lack of language proficiency

Language is a considerable barrier to intercultural communication and building interpersonal relationships, as has been demonstrated by numerous empirical studies (e.g. Brewer, 1997; Chen, 1998; Gao & Prime, 2010). This claim is also supported by this study. The data analysis shows that non-proficiency in English emerges as a major factor complicating HCS's intercultural encounters, despite the fact that English proficiency was a basic requirement in UNNC's recruitment of staff, including HCS. The participants' language difficulties had two sources: the participants themselves and the expatriates. In terms of the former, the problem was that the participants could not accurately express their thoughts in English in intercultural encounters. In terms of the latter, the expatriates' rapid speech, accents, dialects, and slang emerged as significant obstacles hindering HCS's understanding in intercultural encounters.

With respect to the linguistic issues stemming from HCS themselves, Mike made a contrast between his conversations in Chinese and English.

> 我觉得语言毕竟是一个非常大的障碍，即使你说能够懂意思，但是中方的表达还是很大的问题。因为有些时候想去表达一个意思的时候，毕竟不是母语文化，那就无法认同，或者这种程度上，母语表达他可以认同90%，但是比如说用英语表达只能认同50%，他能catch到的也只有这么一点，这是一个很大的障碍。(Mike)

Language is a great barrier, I suppose. Even if we could get what they said, however, they could hardly catch what we Chinese staff wanted to express completely. After all, English is not our native language, and maybe sometimes the English expressions we use are not very proper. If I could express myself in my mother tongue, 90 per cent of my ideas could be grasped and accepted, while if in English, only 50 per cent of what I

say can be understood by the expatriates. Therefore, it is a huge barrier. (Mike)

Mike's feeling is common among HCS. For example, Olivia, whose first degree was in English, still felt that

虽然我一直学英文，出国出差什么的练过口语，但是还是真的说做朋友的话，有一些生活方面的英语什么的还是不行，还是要再练。(Olivia)

Although I have been learning English and practised oral English in business abroad, when it comes to making friends, I still feel inadequate in everyday English. I still need more practice. (Olivia)

The reasons behind this were diverse. First, some participants experienced difficulty when encountering complicated technical vocabulary, as Mary explained:

因为在交流的过程当中，工作上他可能会涉及到一些技术类的问题，或者更细的问题，那我觉得困难就是你用中文交流起来，解释某一些问题比较容易一点，用英文的话可能是说有一些很细一点的词汇，可能是说这个方面稍微有点困难。(Mary)

It is possible for some technical or more professional issues to be involved in intercultural encounters. I feel that it is more difficult to explain these things in English than Chinese as it involves some subtle vocabulary. (Mary)

Apart from the issue related to technical vocabulary, Mary also mentioned that the lack of a corresponding link between different cultures towards a special phenomenon is another problem. For example, *ren qing*, as explained in section 4.3.4, implies at least three layers of meaning, depending on the context. It is hard to find a particular English word or phrase to match it.

As for the linguistic hindrances resulting from the expatriates, rapid speech, accents, dialects and slang constituted obstacles for HCS in understanding their interlocutors in the context of oral communication. For example, Jennifer mentioned that she was totally confused when the expatriates spoke too quickly, while Ted stated that accent was an obstacle in intercultural contact. In addition, dialects and slang also made it difficult for HCS to understand what the

expatriates wanted to express, especially in the context of daily life. Compared with work-based communication, communication associated with daily life is much more complicated. One reason is because it involves dialects and slang, which are not easy for HCS to acquire without relevant daily life experiences, even though they may be fluent in work-related communication. In other words, their grasp of English is not sophisticated enough, at least in real life, to communicate at a subtle level. Perhaps the expatriates also realized that and therefore spoke differently among themselves and with HCS, which was noticed by John.

> 大家普遍英语水平还可以，但是很多都是限于paper work或者是讲出来也没有问题。我们彼此能听懂，没问题，互相理解、表达这些都是应该不是问题。但是如果在生活中的话，我觉得可能有时候老外跟你去聊，跟老外之间聊的话，不会一样。他表达同样的意思，但是他说的话会不一样，因为会带方言、俗语。(John)

> We are generally good at English but our level of English proficiency is limited to paper work or a conversational level. However, living English is sometimes different from working English. They do not explain themselves in the same way when talking amongst themselves as they do when talking to us. In their own conversation, they prefer dialects and slang. (John)

Overall, imperfect English proficiency, especially in daily life, reduces HCS's willingness to communicate with the expatriates to a large extent, especially outside work. Having analysed the impact of language on intercultural contact, it is easily seen that a lack of language proficiency emerges as a great barrier in intercultural encounters, at least from the perspective of HCS. This finding supports Piller's (2011) claim that language can be regarded as a key concern in the field of intercultural communication. Similarly, language proficiency can create asymmetries or power differentials in intercultural encounters (Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Mompoint-Gaillard, & Philippou, forthcoming). From the perspective of the participants, their lack of English proficiency to some extent undermined their self-confidence in intercultural encounters and thereby affected their willingness to make contact with the expatriates. This point is related to the next hindrance: lower self-esteem.

Lower self-esteem

In addition to the linguistic issue, lower self-esteem is another barrier in intercultural encounters from the participants' perspective. According to Tajfel's (1981, p. 254) social identity theory, an individual always "strives to achieve a satisfactory concept or image of himself" in social interaction. This kind of satisfactory self-concept is labelled higher self-esteem. Thus, if individuals cannot obtain higher self-esteem in intercultural interaction, they tend to avoid it in order to protect their self-esteem. In the data analysis, HCS's lower self-esteem appeared to stem from two sources. One was a lack of confidence which was related to language proficiency, and the other was a perceived inferiority in the working context.

As discussed above, to varying degrees the participants realized an inability to understand precisely and express themselves accurately, especially in daily intercultural encounters. This disadvantage to a large extent affected their confidence in intercultural encounters. They did not dare take the first step when experiencing such a big obstacle, as Jane mentioned. Robert also noticed this phenomenon. He speculated:

> 有些人不愿意跟老外交流，可能从我的看法的话就是语言没有达到一定的熟练程度，比较没有这种自信吧。我在想他们内心世界也蛮想跟老外交流，只是就是说在一定程度上的话没有这么大的信心迈出这一步，主动去跟你打招呼，或者跟你谈一些什么东西。更多就是自信心没有到那个程度，或者比较害怕。(Robert)

> It seems that some of our Chinese staff would rather not talk with the expatriates. The point, I think, is that they are not so confident about their English speaking. I suppose they would be eager to have more contact with the foreign staff, to find the opportunity to say 'hello', or to have a talk about something if they could. They are just not confident in English speaking, or because of their fears. (Robert)

The other factor contributing to lower self-esteem perhaps derives from a perceived inferiority on the part of HCS in intercultural encounters. As discussed in Chapter 1, the expatriates at UNNC generally have higher positions than HCS personnel. Hence, HCS do not seem interested in seeking solutions when they

encounter complaints and even shouting from the expatriates owing to their positions. As Valerie mentioned,

因为有的时候外国人他比较盛气凌人，他是会过来跟我们shouting。那我的同事他们也是比较韧的，而且其实他们也觉得有的事情不该是他们出面去解决，所以他们就是会正常的，就还会很和颜悦色的告诉他这个事情应该去找谁。因为我们只是提供学术服务的，我们不是决策者。所以可能也是工作性质的影响，不会跟他们有太多争议的时候。(Valerie)

Some foreign staff hold us in contempt and shout at us. In such a situation, our Chinese colleagues are very calm and patient, and will tell them who they should turn to for help in a nice manner if they themselves are not in charge of the issue. Our work is to provide academic service, and we are not decision-makers. We avoid too much disagreement with them, possibly owing to the influence of position. (Valerie)

Coupled with this, there are two salary systems at UNNC, as in the branches of other multinational corporations in China. Some participants felt that this kind of salary system is unfair to HCS. As a result of this, in Joseph's account it might hurt the Chinese staff's personal dignity; in John's perception it produced a sense of inequality; and from Barbara's viewpoint it gave rise to psychological imbalance. Overall, this kind of inequality appeared to affect HCS's self-esteem and self-confidence.

那本身就是学校有不公平的地方，比如说薪水的不公平，行政的大大低与教师的，只是他们的几分之几，主要就是这个，这个也不可能平等起来。……你是服务的一个人员，所以你会从心理上会感觉到不自信啊，或者这种自卑的因素。(Mike)

The university itself has defects with regard to equality. For example, the big problem is that people are not equally paid. The salary for administrative staff is far less than that for teachers, and the disparity can be as much as several times… If I am part of the administrative staff, I am given a much lower salary because I am just a staff member who provides service, which could affect my self-confidence or make me have a sense of inferiority. (Mike)

This status difference underpinned the perceived inferiority of HCS at UNNC. For instance, Valerie perceived herself to be inferior in intercultural encounters, and

hence was not interested in seeking solutions when a consensus was not reached. This perception is supported by her words.

> 其实我们是属于相对比较弱势的一个群体，就是如果达不到一个共同点的话，我们也不会跟他继续的讲下去。因为大家彼此都有不同的老板，那可能就会跟他说："OK，这个事情你既然这样想的话，那我们可以去找院长去talk。"这样就不会有同事不停的跟我们这样计较下去。(Valerie)

> In fact, we are not the party who dominates things. If it becomes impossible to reach an agreement with them, we won't keep negotiating with them, because both parties have their own superiors. Instead, we say, "OK, we could talk with the Dean if you think so". In this way, they won't keep talking to us. (Valerie)

The hindrance to intercultural contact caused by lower self-confidence is shown in Dunne's (2008) study as well. The author conducted research into host Irish students' intercultural contact with foreign students on campus. His findings showed that lower self-confidence and a poor self-image gave rise to lower self-esteem and thereby complicated intercultural contact. The findings in this study support his results.

In summary, lower self-esteem hinders HCS's willingness to have contact with the expatriates at UNNC, and lower self-confidence and perceived inferiority can be identified as two factors contributing to lower self-esteem from the perspective of the participants.

Lack of similarity

Apart from linguistic issues and lower self-esteem, the hindrance of lack of similarity emerged very strongly from the data. This theme is closely related to an organising concept: homophily. The concept of homophily is "the tendency of people with similar traits (including physical, cultural, and attitudinal characteristics) to interact with one another more than with people with dissimilar traits" (Centola, Gonzalez-Avella, Eguiluz, & Miguel, 2007, pp. 905-906). Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954), the originators of this concept, distinguished between status and value homophily. Similarity of age, sex, race, ethnicity,

religion, and education can be categorized under status homophily, while similarity of values, attitudes and belief can be labelled value homophily.

Under the principle of homophily, people tend to associate with others similar to themselves if the option is available (Dunne, 2008). Within the context of the present study, this hypothesis predicts that HCS at UNNC would interact more frequently with each other than with the expatriates. This principle finds strong support in the data. Many participants noticed the phenomenon of the staff at UNNC naturally splitting into two groups on collective occasions: the expatriates and HCS. Furthermore, the participants also admitted that their main networks were still Chinese.

Obviously, there are numerous dissimilarities between HCS and the expatriates, as discussed in chapter 4. These dissimilarities reduce the possibilities for HCS to engage with the expatriates. Nevertheless, it remains to be determined whether all the perceived dissimilarities affected intercultural contact from HCS's perspective. Hence, it is necessary to explore their perspective on the dissimilarities reducing intercultural contact within the context of UNNC. Understanding these dissimilarities may provide deeper insights into the complexity of intercultural contact. An analysis of the data identifies three dissimilarities: "lack of common life habits", "lack of conversational topics" and "lack of consensual values", each of which will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs. These hindrances are closely related to the participants' perceptions of cultural differences, which were discussed in chapter 4.

First, different life habits are apparent in discouraging HCS from keeping in touch with the expatriates in their spare time. As established previously, the participants appear not to be used to "dipping bar" or "going Dutch" with their friends, while the expatriates seemed to be disinterested in some popular entertainment activities of the Chinese, such as cards and Karaoke. From the perspective of HCS, as discussed previously, spending the whole night in a pub was boring and "going Dutch" with friends was usually unacceptable in the Chinese context. Hence, the lack of commonalities in life habits to some extent hindered HCS's intercultural communication with the expatriates, at least in their spare time.

Second, in addition to different life habits, a lack of common conversation topics emerged very strongly as a big barrier in intercultural encounters from the perspective of the participants. The data show that there are two factors contributing to this hindrance: lack of common cultural background and the expatriates' concern for privacy. In the first place, the expatriates at UNNC were from more than forty countries and had different life experiences, which might be unfamiliar to HCS. Those who had had experience of overseas study were no exception to this feeling. Fred attributed this issue to different cultural backgrounds. He explained:

虽然中方人员大多数都有国外留学的经历，对国外的文化也比较熟悉。但是他们毕竟在国内生活了几十年，国内生活的这些因素都是根深蒂固的，这个很难去改变的。所以如果我跟中方员工在一起，可能会感觉很轻松，跟老外在一起好像有的时候没什么话题。(Fred)

Most of our Chinese staff are familiar with foreign cultures since they have experiences of being abroad. It is still hard for them to change the very traditional thought that is rooted in their blood. After all, they were born and bred here and have lived here for dozens of years. Sometimes I would rather stay with our Chinese colleagues, with whom I feel much easier, whereas there seem to be no topics of conversation with the foreigners. (Fred)

This kind of feeling was also echoed by Jennifer, who had even built friendships with some expatriates and got on well with them. She admitted that the topics of conversation at the parties organised by the expatriates were not familiar to her, and hence she preferred to listen to their talk rather than join in. According to the status homophily principle, people tend to interact with others who share similar cultural backgrounds (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). The above findings provide evidence to validate this principle among the Chinese participants in this study.

The second factor inhibiting interlocutors having topics in common is the participants' care over handling the expatriates' concern for privacy. Owing to this, many participants tried to avoid topics relevant to family affairs so as not to invade the others' privacy, no matter how familiar they were with each other. As Jennifer remarked,

有几个老外平时就特别熟，那也都挺要好的。那反正也有一些什么事情都也会说的，只不过其实你说到底就是特别那种私人的，或者就是那种私人的问题，其实到后来不会跟老外去讲。有一些可能聊的深一点，但也不会触及到很私人的或者怎么样。老外有一些很隐私的东西他也不会跟你讲的。（Jennifer）

I have close friendships with some of our foreign staff, and we usually talk about everything when we are together. In spite of this, I never touch on my very personal affairs with them even if sometimes we have a deep conversation. And neither do the expatriates. (Jennifer)

Third, a lack of consensual values also appears as a source of lack of similarity. For example, under Confucian values, it is quite normal in Chinese society for parents to take the responsibility of buying a property for their adult children, while children need to be responsible for their parents in later life. Nevertheless, this value is hard for some expatriates to accept, as Jennifer perceived:

因为他觉得父母因为生了你，所以他就有义务把你养大成人。你长大了，反正父母他们也各种养老，医疗也都很齐全。那你觉得你自己多去看看他们当然好。(Jennifer)

He believes that it's their parents that give them life, so parents have the obligation to bring them up. When they are grown up, it is better if they can often visit them, but it's not their obligation to look after them, because parents have comprehensive pensions and medical welfare. (Jennifer)

She further explained that it was always hard to understand each other completely since there seemed to be no empathy between the expatriates and the Chinese, unlike between Chinese. Here, Jennifer's account refers to an important concept: value homophily (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). This means that people tend to interact with others who share the same beliefs and values. Indeed, people feel more comfortable if their opinions can be validated by their interlocutors (Dunne, 2008).

This analysis supports the conclusion that dissimilarities between the participants and the expatriates hindered the participants' willingness to interact with the expatriates if the option was available. The dissimilarities encompass a lack of

common life habits, conversational topics and consensual values.

Lack of availability

In addition to lack of similarity, lack of availability is another hindrance in intercultural contact in daily life from the participants' perspective. Lack of availability here refers to the participants having no spare time to engage with the expatriates in daily life. The data analysis suggests that both family commitments and a fixed social circle are major factors which disincentivised the participants from socializing with the expatriates during their spare time.

As stated in section 3.3.5, the average age of HCS at UNNC was about 31 in 2011. Those who have children need to spend much time on their family duties as young parents. Coupled with the one-child policy in urban regions of China, Chinese families traditionally pay considerable attention to the education and nurture of their children. Hence, it is understandable for some participants to devote their spare time to their family, even though they might love to socialize with the expatriates. Fred's experience exemplified such a situation:

> 因为家庭原因，很少跟他们联系，因为家里事情比较多。之前也跟几个老外吃过饭，前几年倒是挺多的，有些老师还是比较好的，他们家里开party会邀请我们几个。(Fred)

> We can't be in close touch with them, because we are busy with household chores, which prevent us from sparing more time and energy for frequent contact with them. We often had dinners with some foreign staff before, and they were very kind to invite us to the parties at their homes. (Fred)

An observation by Valerie confirmed that Fred's experience was typical amongst the cluster of HCS at UNNC. According to her, some Chinese colleagues had to give up their efforts to socialize with the expatriates since they had no extra time to do other things except look after their family members.

> 也是看我们的精力吧，当然有些同事我相信他们并不是不想融入外国人这样一个环境，而是说他没有这个精力。比如说下了班回家照顾家里人，或者怎么样的。(Valerie)

It depends on our spare time and energy. Some of our Chinese staff don't keep in close touch with the foreign staff, which does not mean they wouldn't like to but they can't. For example, they need to look after their families after work or do something else. (Valerie)

In addition to lack of time, a lack of need for affection is another reason for married people not to keep in touch with the expatriates. Generally, relationships between Chinese family members are very close. Maintaining these intimate relationships not only takes up Chinese people's spare time, but also meets their affective needs. Hence, they may not be able to afford so much spare time and energy to expand their social circle; or they may not even have the desire to do so, as Ellen remarked:

就我自己的经历，因为我觉得各自大家都有家庭，然后你本身就有自己固定的朋友圈，除非是说经常在聊，你跟某一个比如说外籍教师联系的比较多，然后可能他这个人确实非常nice，会涉及到一些工作外的话题，这样有可能会继续发展，变成一个friends。但是基本上像我们有各自的家庭，都专注在自己的事情上，很难说有进一步的这种沟通交流。(Ellen)

As far as my own experiences are concerned, we all have our own families, are busily occupied in our own business, and also have our own old bosom friends, so we hardly have deep conversations with foreign staff. Only if you stay with a foreign teacher, who is a very nice guy, and you talk together beyond working topics, can you develop friendship with a foreign guy. (Ellen)

Accordingly, focus on their family lives and their Chinese social circles appeared to be a barrier to intercultural relations among HCS and this reduced their needs to engage with the expatriates.

Perceived communication difficulties with the expatriates

Apart from the lack of similarity and availability, perceived difficulties of communication also emerge as a major barrier in the intercultural encounters from the participants' perspective. This hindrance derives from the expatriates. Evidence for this in the data encompasses negative personality traits and negative attitudes on the part of the expatriates towards HCS in intercultural encounters.

In terms of individual personality traits, the participants were willing to establish contact with those who are open-minded and agreeable much more than with those whose minds are closed, or who are introverted or even obstinate. For instance, as Herbert mentioned,

如果他一直非常的固执，然后就不肯做一点改变的话，确实也是比较难沟通的。(Herbert)

If he is always obstinate, and won't make any compromise, it is hard to have an effective talk with him. (Herbert)

In addition, those who tended to be extra troublesome to the participants were not welcomed. As Jennifer remarked,

有一些人他就是要求比较多，有时候提出一些东西，比如说催着你很急，有一些就老是不停的问这个好了没有，那平时就是我对他的印象就形成了，这个人好像蛮难弄，很讨厌，平时就不会怎么睬他了。(Jennifer)

Sometimes you might meet some expatriates who make too many annoying demands. For example, they keep pushing you for one thing, so that your impression of them becomes formed: he/she is nasty, and I don't want to talk with him/her any more. (Jennifer)

Nevertheless, compared with personality traits, negative and prejudiced attitudes among the expatriates played a large role in rendering the participants unwilling to socialize with them. HCS tried to avoid interacting with those who they perceived as prejudiced, self-important and rude towards the Chinese, as exemplified in the following extracts:

当她对你有偏见，我的意见她听不进去的时候，你就不想交流了。(Rebecca)

I wouldn't go on talking with someone who has a prejudice against me and wouldn't take any of my suggestions. (Rebecca)

如果说对方非常的rude，你会本能的一个排斥。(Veronica)

If the guy you converse with is very rude, you will probably feel repulsion towards him/her. (Veronica)

如果他的态度比较傲慢，不会有跟他继续沟通。或者跟他再讨论一些问题的想法，或者说他给出的很多东西都是很主观的意见，也会不利于沟通。 (Herbert)

If he/she is self-important or has very subjective opinions, we won't get on with him/her. (Herbert)

我说的阻碍这种沟通的是他可能本身也有一种偏见，就是有些中国人他怎么做怎么做，然后他已经有一种mindset，就是固有的，你们中国人是这么做事的，然后也把我这种个体混为一谈。比如说有些中国人可能守时性不好，那他可能会把我这种个体也是守时性不好。(Mike)

I mean barriers to our intercourse with foreign staff are that some foreigners have some sort of prejudices against the Chinese. They have already established a sort of mindset towards us, and always presume that we are definitely bound to confirm their expectations. Accordingly, they might assume that I, an individual person, should conform to what they expect of the Chinese. For example, some Chinese are not always on time, and they may assume I should have the same problem as well. (Mike)

Positive attitudes to intercultural communication are considered a pre-condition for successful intercultural interaction (Byram, 1997). Similarly, they are emphasized as being a fundamental starting point in Deardorff's (2006) Pyramid and Process Models of Intercultural Competence. The data analysis shows that negative attitudes of the expatriates manifested in intercultural encounters indeed posed problems for HCS's engagement in such encounters.

5.1.3 Conclusions

This section has explored HCS participants' negative responses towards cultural differences and the reasons underlying these responses. The data analysis shows that the two types of negative responses identified by Osland et al. (2007) can be found in the current study's data. Nevertheless, the reasons behind these responses are numerous. The analysis has identified lack of language proficiency, lower self-esteem, lack of similarity, lack of availability and perceived communication difficulties. As explained above, these various factors stem from the participants themselves, the interlocutors and the organisation. Most of them, such as lack of language and lack of similarity, are hard to overcome in a short period of time.

The complexity of the factors producing negative responses to cultural differences also indicates the difficulty of intercultural communication.

To conclude, this section has discussed the participants' negative responses to cultural differences and possible causes hampering their engagement with the expatriates by drawing on Osland et al.'s (2007) model. The data analysis confirms Osland et al.'s identifications of the patterns of individuals' negative responses to cultural differences. However, this study has extended their model by exploring the potential causes behind these negative responses, i.e. the participants' lack of language proficiency, lower self-esteem, lack of similarity, lack of availability, and perceived communication difficulties.

Having explained the negative responses towards cultural differences and the factors underlying them, the next section will analyse how the expatriates try to put aside negative emotional responses and engage in intercultural sensemaking despite these perceived differences and difficulties.

5.2 Intercultural sensemaking response

According to Osland et al. (2007), intercultural sensemaking is a positive response to cultural differences as it involves seeking cultural understanding. Furthermore, they draw on Osland and Bird's (2005-2006; 2000) model of intercultural sensemaking to explain how people respond to a trigger event from the perspective of intercultural sensemaking. However, Osland and Bird's (2005-2006; 2000) model does not highlight the ongoing aspect of sensemaking. In other words, it does not explore what it means to those who engage in ongoing intercultural sensemaking over a comparatively long period of time, which is the focus of this study. Bearing this in mind, this section attempts to investigate the ongoing processes of intercultural sensemaking in order to understand why it is positive in intercultural encounters. This is a complex process, involving the comprehensive application of a sensemaker's cognition, knowledge and skills in a specific context.

Analysis of the data shows that there are three concurrent processes through

which the participants confront cultural differences. First, intercultural sensemaking includes a process of identity construction (section 5.2.1). Second, it involves a process of learning (section 5.2.2). Third, it also includes a process of relationship building (section 5.2.3). These three processes are intertwined and are discussed separately here purely for expositional convenience. Finally, conclusions to the section follow (section 5.2.4).

5.2.1 A process of identity construction

Identity construction is essential in the processes of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). It is situation-specific as the sensemaker's identities are closely related to the identities of others (Vaara, 2000). In other words, what others think we are and how they treat us stabilizes or destabilizes our identity (Weick, et al., 2005). As Blumer (1969) explains,

> Human beings in interacting with one another have to take account of what each other is doing or is about to do; they are forced to direct their own conduct or handle their situation in terms of what they take into account. Thus, the activities of others enter as positive factors in the formation of their own conduct; in the face of the actions of others one may abandon an intention or purpose, revise it, check or suspend it, intensify it, or replace it. (p.8)

The data show that the participants construct their identities in the processes of sensemaking to varying degrees by drawing on their interpretations of some aspects of culture differences between themselves and the expatriates such as personality traits, communication styles and cultural values.

Alteration of work/life habits

As discussed in chapter 4 (section 4.3.1), the participants perceived that the expatriates were used to confirming decisions by email after oral discussion so as to avoid misunderstanding. This habit was adopted by many participants. As Kelly mentioned,

> 因为我原来国企出来到现在，感受到他们沟通上好的一方面……所以我觉得包括以后的工作当中，包括以后在学校里跟中方员工沟通，有些好的东西我可能还是

会，比如说discussion之后发一个confirmation的email，我会去做。(Kelly)

Because I worked in a state-run enterprise before, I know the positive side of [the expatriates] in communication... which now helps me better in my current work, which includes my communication with our Chinese staff. For example, I will send them a confirmation by email after discussion. (Kelly)

Apart from this, some participants also tended to act differently when socializing with the staff at UNNC and their Chinese friends outside UNNC. John noticed that it was quite normal for the staff, especially the young ones, at UNNC to pay for themselves at collective events. Nevertheless, like Robert, he could accept paying for himself when socialising with the expatriates but still complied with Chinese tradition with his Chinese friends. As for Joseph, he learned a lesson from his contact with the expatriates. Namely, he tried not to disturb the expatriates in off-work time unless it was very urgent:

他们是只要过了四点钟，只要到了下班时间（任何工作）都不行。这个是我没有料到的，所以就是我们后来工作的时候，一旦有什么事情，就预料给自己一个缓冲时间，这样的话就把问题解决了。(Joseph)

They do not like to do any more extra work after four o'clock in the afternoon, which I never knew before. In order to deal better with this situation, I therefore have learned to keep some spare time for unexpected events afterwards and consequently have solved the problem. (Joseph)

Being courteous

Courtesy is fundamental in any contact with the expatriates owing to the divergence of culture. Some formal observances such as polite words and making an appointment are not necessary between acquaintances. The Chinese staff at UNNC paid attention to courtesies in intercultural encounters. For example, the participants tended to use courteous formulae and titles in the context of both face-to-face and written interpersonal communication, as shown by the case of Jane, who was cautious at the very beginning of intercultural conversation:

开场的时候他可能也是比较[礼貌]，就觉得这是基本的。打开两个人的交流的话，

这是首要的。(Jane)

He/she also is very polite when he/she attempts to begin a talk with others, which is the basic and most important manner. (Jane)

Moreover, some participants mentioned that they would make an appointment with expatriates if they needed a meeting since it was impolite to drop in someone's office without an appointment, as John confirmed. So, his first sentence to the expatriate was "sorry to interrupt you without an appointment" if there was an emergency. Furthermore, some participants also cared about protocol in contact with the expatriates. For example, Ted would prepare coffee for a meeting instead of tea since the expatriates tend to prefer coffee rather than China tea.

In addition to face-to-face etiquette, the participants also paid attention to written etiquette. For instance, both Amelia and Jane were polite and courteous in email communication:

因为大多数我们都是在邮件交流的比较多……整个话语在表达的时候，就是我觉得两点最重要，一个就是非常的polite，一个就是非常的professional。(Amelia)

We communicate by e-mail in most cases… I think there are two most important points to be considered in communication, one is to be very polite, and the other one is to be very professional. (Amelia)

我觉得可能，其实他们还是蛮重礼节的，所以我写邮件的时候是很客气的。(Jane)

I think they attach great importance to polite manners, so I always try to word my e-mails with politeness. (Jane)

Chinese tend to be courteous towards out-groups while they usually treat the in-group informally (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). In the context of UNNC, this rule appeared to be stressed by HCS, and might indicate that HCS tried to adapt to the ways the expatriates communicated with others. Alternatively, it might indicate that their relationships with the expatriates were not close, as the participants treated their expatriate colleagues as an out-group and thus maintained politeness in communication with them.

Being conscientious

Conscientiousness was one of the personality traits of the expatriates perceived by the participants. In response, the participants tried to be conscientious in the course of intercultural communication. For example, Amelia reiterated that she tried her best to be thorough in order to be professional. She would take detail into consideration, such as the use of polite language, comprehensive understanding of issues, and so forth in intercultural encounters:

> 那通常我的原则是想的尽量想的周到一点，就是说我能想到的方面也都会去想到。就是说我会站在一个我能做到，尽量高水准的这种专业技能角度上，非常直接的专业的角度上去跟他对话，就是非常注重professional。(Amelia)

> I normally try to be considerate of other people. In other words, I try to talk to them in a very direct and professional way. (Amelia)

Similarly, both Tom and Ted prepared things carefully in advance. They tended to prepare everything they considered necessary to deal with potential issues. As Ted explained, he preferred to research in detail before the commencement of every programme, which enabled him to be professional. Furthermore, Herbert tended to provide accurate and comprehensive information for his expatriate colleagues without any subjective judgement, which would be beneficial for effective communication.

Showing concern for others' privacy

In addition to behavioural adjustment, the participants also altered conversational topics in contact with the expatriates. Having perceived that the expatriates regarded their personal information as private and thereby would rather not talk about it on public occasions, the participants were cautious about this and thus inclined to avoid sensitive topics such as religion, family, taboos and so forth in their intercultural encounters. As John suggested,

> 和老外打交道的时候，我就比较注意这个，一般情况下，他不告诉你的话，不去问他的家人……了解不同国家的风俗习惯，尤其是禁忌这一块要清楚。……尽可能少的去谈论宗教问题。(John)

I personally pay attention to this when I talk with foreigners. I usually do not inquire about information relevant to their families unless they take the initiative to tell me… Learn different countries' cultures and customs, and in particular their taboos... Try your best to avoid discussing religion with them. (John)

Adopting a more direct communication style

This emerges very strongly from the data. As discussed in section 4.2.1, the expatriates were generally perceived to express their views in a direct way. Consequently, the participants would, unconsciously or consciously, accommodate their communication styles in order to make intercultural communication smooth. There are numerous instances supporting this finding. For instance, Robert tended to directly express his own views or standpoints in contact with the expatriates, while maintaining contact with the Chinese in an indirect way:

> 跟老外接触的话，特殊的技巧可能更直接点，有什么东西就直接说。但跟中国人，和中方的员工在一起说的话，因为中国文化的话在一定程度上还是含蓄的，有一些时候是没法说。 (Robert)

> The special skill is being more direct in contact with the foreigners, while it is hard to communicate directly sometimes with Chinese and Chinese staff because Chinese culture is indirect to some degree. (Robert)

Kelly was used to talking in a direct way with the expatriates. She was inclined to tell her expatriate colleagues the facts or results directly on the basis of organisational imperatives. In terms of this point, the accounts of Rebecca and Kelly are typical:

> 我觉得跟外国人打交道，他们的文化就是你要跟我说清楚，你有道理就直接说，哪怕有时候argue一下，注意说话的礼貌，但是你要把话讲透。我觉得这一点对沟通来说特别重要。 (Rebecca)

> I think their (foreign staff) culture is: "make your points clearly". You can express what you think only if you think there's some sense in it, or even argue with them, which is acceptable, but be polite. It's particularly important I think in such a conversation to explain what you think thoroughly. (Rebecca)

跟老外沟通的时候我觉得该坚持的坚持，该说明白的说明白，关键就是说你坚持的同时你让他知道，把该解释的解释清楚，这个是比较重要。(Kelly)

We should maintain our opinions and make the points clear when we need to communicate with foreign staff. The point is to thoroughly explain what you have to explain to them while you maintain your opinions, which is very important. (Kelly)

Furthermore, directly expressing their opinions sometimes requires individuals to clearly state their standpoints, whether they are "yes" or "no". The latter is usually difficult for the Chinese. Thus, Jennifer initially tended to find an excuse, such as "let me try again", to avoid directly saying "no" to the expatriates, but soon found that this kind of communication style did not work in intercultural encounters. This is because she felt that the expatriates would be more disappointed when they eventually discovered the truth later. So, she remarked:

就觉得有些东西就直接跟他们表明行就是行，不行就是不行……可是有的时候不好意思当面拒绝，后来想想那还不如直接拒绝。所以我觉得还是直接一点，反正是就是，不是就是不是，如果你模棱两可，还给自己找麻烦。(Jennifer)

I think sometimes we should make our attitudes clear to them: agree or disagree. Although sometimes it's difficult for us to refuse others face to face, we think afterwards that it would have been better to refuse straightway. So now I think we'd better make an outright refusal to others if we can: yes or no, that's it. An ambiguous position is likely to bring trouble to ourselves. (Jennifer)

Numerous intercultural studies (e.g. Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Holmes, 2008; Wang, 2010a) show that Chinese are used to keeping quiet on public occasions such as in the classroom and at meetings. However, it can be seen from the above accounts that many participants tended to directly express their ideas in the context of UNNC. Accordingly, the findings in this study show that the social context, including who the interlocutors are, has significant influences on the way people communicate.

This section has explored the participants' identity constructions in their daily/work habits, personality traits and communication styles in the context of UNNC. They alter some of their habits, personality traits and even communication

styles in communication with their expatriate colleagues to varying degrees. As discussed in the above paragraphs, the participants manifest some of the characteristics they perceive in the expatriates which seem contradictory with those of Chinese in general. In the context of UNNC, the participants tended to emphasise a concern for courtesy and privacy of the other, to pay for themselves and express themselves in a direct way. In short, they construct their identities by adjusting their daily/work habits, personality traits and communication styles in communication with the expatriates.

The data analysis in chapter 4 showed that some essentialist theories about Chinese culture (e.g. Hall's (1976) high-low context theory, and Hofstede's (2001) national value dimensions), were to some extent useful in making sense of the participants' interpretations about cultural others, while these theories do not work when interpreting the participants' behaviour in specific situations. For example, the above accounts suggest that, consciously or unconsciously, some participants adopt a direct communication style at least in intercultural encounters, which indicates that Hall's (1976) low-context and high-context communication framework cannot sufficiently explain HCS's communication style in the context of UNNC.

The reasons behind this are perhaps multiple. First, these "either-or" paradigms ignore the paradoxical nature of cultural values (both-and) (Fang, 2005-2006). From a paradoxical perspective, opposite cultures can co-exist in one person. Consequently, an individual can be both individualistic and collectivistic, or direct and indirect in communication style depending on the context. Indeed, the data show that some participants, such as Robert, Rebecca and Ted, pay for themselves when socializing with the expatriates but still take turns to pay when with Chinese. In addition to this, many participants mentioned, as discussed previously, that they tended to speak directly in their intercultural encounters, but indirectly with Chinese colleagues.

Second, these bipolar paradigms tend to describe culture as stable and time- and context-free, which is rather problematic in the era of globalization and transnationalism since national boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred

(Fang, 2010; Piller, 2011). As discussed in chapter 2 (section 2.2.3), China has changed considerably over the last three decades and has engaged extensively with people beyond its borders. As a result of this trend, personnel mobility has become more and more frequent and normal. Along with the increasing number of foreign people coming to China for work or travel, more and more Chinese people are going abroad for various purposes. In the case of HCS at UNNC, about half of them had already had experiences abroad for travel, study or work. They tended to accept and adjust to new things easily and be influenced by people from other cultural backgrounds, as can be seen in the above sections. Piller (2011) emphasizes that "cultural and communicative styles and values have become diluted and have acquired a mix-and-match flavour" in the context of globalisation and transnationalism (p. 69). Indeed, as discussed previously, some expatriates at UNNC appear indirect in communication style and care much about Chinese *guan xi*. Likewise, many participants are inclined to express themselves directly, at least in the context of UNNC, which is contrary to some theories of Chinese national culture. For instance, when people adopt a direct communication style they risk destroying a harmonious atmosphere; therefore, Chinese people typically try to avoid this. Nevertheless, the Chinese at UNNC appear to be direct in their contact with the expatriates. Thus, the above models are not sufficiently sophisticated to explain the findings in this study.

Third, these essentialist paradigms downplay individual agency in intercultural interaction. Dao (2011) presumes that the primary purpose of these paradigms is to compare cultures rather than handle understanding of intercultural interaction. Thus, they cannot explain the complexity of interpersonal interaction, especially in intercultural encounters. This complexity is termed "cultural realism" by Holliday (2010). It "not only acknowledges the influence of national structures but also allows for the agency of the individual" (p. 259). His empirical study finds that national cultural characteristics are still there and they play a role in intercultural communication. Simultaneously, individual factors such as personality, previous experiences and attitudes are also significant in interpersonal communication. They interconnect with each other in a specific context and co-shape the complexity of intercultural communication. Furthermore, Piller

(2011) clearly points out that it is possible to gain an understanding of intercultural communication by bearing in mind the question "who makes culture relevant to whom in which context for which purposes?" (p.73). Piller stresses the impact of the interlocutor, the context and the purpose of intercultural communication, and the findings in this study support that view. In the context of UNNC, the participants have to some extent to alter their behaviour to succeed in task-based communication with the expatriates.

Holliday's and Piller's views about the understanding of intercultural communication are similar to Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory. From the perspective of sensemaking, who we are (a sensemaker's identity) is shaped by and related to others (the expatriates here), and the social context (the organisational environment) is crucial for a sensemaker to give a plausible explanation for and make a subsequent response to an unexpected event.

To conclude, the processes of intercultural sensemaking suggest that the construction of the sensemaker's identities is related to the participants' perceptions of cultural differences, the context in which sensemaking occur, and the interlocutors. I next explore another concurrent process in intercultural sensemaking: a learning process.

5.2.2 A process of learning

According to Weick (1995), sensemaking is retrospective, since people use retrospect to make sense of current (communicative) puzzles, and test them through subsequent action. Thus, the processes of sensemaking involve the sensemaker's perception and interpretation of discrepant expectations. Such processes of perceiving and interpreting are identified as processes of intuiting and interpreting at the individual level in organisational learning theories (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999). Similarly, the processes of intercultural sensemaking include the interpretation and enactment of cultural differences, through which the sensemaker's existing cultural knowledge is examined and updated, intercultural communicative skills are improved, and attitudes are developed. Hence, this section looks at how these components are involved and developed in the

processes of intercultural sensemaking. The data show that positive attitudes, cultural knowledge, linguistic competence and intercultural communicative skills can to some extent be developed, as the following discussion illustrates.

The development of positive attitudes

As stated previously, the process of intercultural sensemaking starts with an awareness of discrepancies and goes on by putting aside negative emotions. This kind of positive response towards cultural differences entails positive attitudes. Analysis of the data in this study shows that a respectful attitude and genuineness on the basis of respect emerge very strongly. Respect refers to having a positive value towards cultural others (Byram, Barrett, Ipgrave, Jackson, & Garcia, 2009).

Many participants believed that reciprocal respect was essential in intercultural encounters no matter where the interlocutors were from, or what personal qualities they possessed. For example, Joseph and Olivia commented,

> 可能中国人更加趋向保守一点，老外更加稍微open一些，但是都是在互相尊重的基础上，没有任何问题。(Joseph)

> Chinese may tend to be more reserved, while foreign staff are more open. If only we can respect each other, no problem should occur, I suppose. (Joseph)

> 尊重很重要我觉得，不管是跟谁的交流。跟外国人交流。而且尊重是相互的，你不尊重人家，人家有感觉的，不是傻子，都感觉的出来。(Olivia)

> No matter who we are going to talk with, showing respect to each other is very important. One can see whether he/she is given due respect when talking with others. (Olivia)

Furthermore, genuineness on the basis of respect is valued as leading to effective intercultural communication. Conflict or disagreement are sometimes regarded as inevitable in the context of multi-cultural workplaces. However, they can be moderated by a genuine attitude. As Fred explained,

> 比如说真诚，你坦诚以对，他也坦诚以对，哪怕双方的意见不同，但这都是可以坐下来谈，慢慢交流的。你退一点，我退一点，最终达成双方都满意的结果。(Fred)

For example, genuineness. Colleagues should always treat each other with genuineness. Even if you have different opinions about an issue, you should sit down and discuss them over time, and finally reach a satisfactory result by negotiation. (Fred)

In summary, the data in terms of the participants' attitudinal factors show that the participants place weight on respectful attitudes in the process of intercultural sensemaking. Furthermore, genuineness on the basis of respect is also valued.

The development of cultural knowledge

Intercultural sensemaking, as discussed previously, is triggered by cultural differences being noticed, which is followed by the interpretation of the differences and a consequent response. In doing this, the self and the other are realized and the cultural knowledge held by the sensemaker is updated and enriched. The data show that the acquisition of cultural knowledge involves three stages: awareness of the self and the other, awareness of stereotypes and prejudice, and a grasp of context-specific knowledge.

First, intercultural stimuli raised the participants' awareness of the self and the other, particularly with respect to differences. As demonstrated in chapter 4, the differences between HCS and the expatriates were apparent in several respects. These differences to some extent influenced individual behaviour in different ways in real intercultural encounters and thereby stimulated the participants' awareness of their own "normal" reactions in similar situations. Such comparisons and contrasts made some participants rethink and reflect on their own culture, as exemplified by Amelia:

学会了反思。因为你跟中方员工，外方员工接触还是有不同的地方，这样的对比加快了你的成熟。(Amelia)

I have learned reflection [on intercultural communication] since there are some differences between contact with the Chinese and foreign staff, and this kind of comparison accelerates my maturity. (Amelia)

Amelia's account was echoed by Vivian and John. Vivian also admitted that such an experience facilitated her rethinking of her own culture, while John claimed

that he now spent considerable time thinking these things over.

Second, the discrepancies perceived stimulate one's interpretation and subsequent reaction, through which one's knowledge is examined and updated. According to Osland and Bird (2005-2006; 2000), people tend to use cultural stereotyping to interpret and interact with cultural others at the very beginning of intercultural communication. This validation of stereotyping knowledge needs to be examined on real occasions. The data analysis in chapter 4 showed that the participants' interpretations of the expatriates to some extent unconsciously manifested their stereotyping. Meanwhile, they perceived that the expatriates were also stereotyping HCS sometimes. Nevertheless, the stereotyping could be realized and overcome with more frequent intercultural contact and deeper intercultural exchange. Jennifer, for instance, after understanding the expatriates better, tended to treat them as being as normal as herself and hence became less nervous in contact with them:

> 刚开始就觉得老外是不是很厉害，有点像西方国家来的，感觉他们是不是高高在上那种感觉。现在没有了，觉得他们就是那种普通人，看到他们。(Jennifer)

> At the very beginning, I wondered if the foreigners were very powerful just like other people from Western countries, and they seemed much superior to me. But now when I meet and get to know them, I just feel that they are ordinary people. (Jennifer)

Third, this kind of ongoing behaviour broadens horizons. Broadening horizons is a synthetic perception after experiencing intercultural encounters. This ongoing process involves the knowledge "that allows you to successfully explain and predict the behaviour of people with different cultural backgrounds within specific situations" (Rasmussen, et al., 2011, p. 69). This kind of situation-specific knowledge is termed attributional knowledge by Bird and Osland (2005-2006), in contrast to factual and conceptual knowledge. Factual knowledge consists of general descriptions of behaviour and attitudes, while conceptual knowledge encompasses a culture's views and values related to central concerns. These two kinds of general knowledge can be transferred to attributional knowledge through the process of intercultural sensemaking. According to Glaser et al. (2007),

intercultural contact on the basis of empathy, flexibility and decentering provides excellent opportunities for individuals to revise their mental constructs, and open up and enrich their perspectives. Indeed, some participants mentioned that working at UNNC could broaden international horizons because it created opportunities for HCS to interact with cultural others and thereby gain first-hand knowledge of cultural others. As Olivia concluded,

> 我变国际化了吧。就是眼界会不一样，因为以前就觉得这个世界就是我看到的这个样子，但是现在因为这些人跟我的接触就发现世界原来还有另外一个样子。这个一定要和人交流才能得到的。(Olivia)

> I became international. It means my vision is different. Because I saw the world like this before but now I find the world looks different after communicating with the expatriates. I can only get this after communicating with them. (Olivia)

Overall, the participants' engagement in intercultural contact and experience provided them with opportunities to see how cultural others behave and think and thereby enrich their perspectives. As a result, people started to emerge from the stage of stereotyping and cultural generalizing.

Improvement in linguistic competence

As stated in section 5.1.2, many participants realized that poor linguistic competence is a large barrier in intercultural interaction. Hence, proper use of English and improving it were treated as important motivating factors for the participants' engagement with the expatriates.

An awareness of the proper use of English is exemplified in Rebecca's case. She mentioned that there was no difference in Chinese if people "want" or ask for something, while people usually use "would like to" or "would love to" to express a desire politely in English. As far as this point is concerned, not only did Rebecca herself learn idiomatic English from the expatriates, but she also suggested her colleagues did so too.

> 所以我后来跟老师在开会的时候说，我们在这样的学校一定要去学grammatical usage。你不能光把英文堆在一起，you don't know how to use it. 你得学习人家地

道的英语。(Rebecca)

So I told my colleagues in the meeting that we should learn grammatical usage in school like this. You cannot just pile up English words together. You don't know how to use them. You should learn English in real life. (Rebecca)

Accordingly, their intercultural encounters provided good opportunities for HCS to practise their English and thereby improve their linguistic competence. Furthermore, improvement of linguistic competence also reduces the possibilities of misunderstanding. As Robert highlighted,

在这里学习工作这么久，那语言这方面上，在一定程度上这几年还是有提高的。在语言提高的基础上，那你的理解能力也会相应的提高一点，沟通技巧也会慢慢的增进，所以这一点的话肯定是时间的推进，你会往上走的，不会是往下跌的那种。(Robert)

[I have] studied and worked here for so long. In terms of language, [I have] made some improvement during these years. As a result of language improvement, my comprehension will improve a bit and my communication skills will gradually improve. So, in a sense, as time goes by, I will go up instead of going down. (Robert)

Overall, improvement of linguistic competence is an obvious priority from HCS's perspective.

Improvement in intercultural communicative skills

The process of sensemaking is about the interplay between interpretation and interaction (Mughan & O'Shea, 2010). Hence, sensemaking involves the ability to interpret and explain uncertain events and subsequently respond to them. This is very much related to Byram's (1997) *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating) and *savoir apprendre/ faire* (skills of discovering and interaction) (Glaser, et al., 2007). As result of engagement in intercultural sensemaking, the participants' capability in the above skills has developed. Indeed, the development of the above skill emerged very strongly in the data. It encompasses empathy, decentering, recentering, and mediating.

Empathy

According to DiStefano and Maznevski (2000, pp. 51-52), "empathy is getting inside another person's skin, thinking as the other person thinks and feeling what the other person feels". The data in this study show that empathetic behaviour is manifested by accommodating to the expatriates' mentality, cultural backgrounds and personality traits.

First, Fred remarked that he tried to communicate with the expatriates depending on their mentality, which usually made the communication more harmonious:

> 我们如果以他的心态跟他交流，他会觉得你跟他是有共同点的，找到了共同点以后，大家说起来就更加和谐一点。(Fred)

> If we communicate with them according to their mentality, he will feel that we are common up to a point with him. Hence, the communication will become more harmonious. (Fred)

Second, some participants tried to think about things from the perspective of the expatriates' cultural backgrounds. As discussed previously, in facing the fact that the expatriates focused more attention on plans, some participants (such as Jane and Ted) tried to understand this phenomenon from the perspective of the expatriates. Robert suggested that it would make intercultural communication easier:

> 如果说作为我的话，平时跟他们玩在一起，我知道他们这么一个文化背景，那就没什么好怕的，你就可以秉着他们的文化跟他们这种方式来对待，所以也还好，谈不上一个困难。(Robert)

> I often hang out with them after work and I know their cultural backgrounds, so I have nothing to fear. Just treat them in a way that they have been shaped by their culture, and so nothing is difficult. (Robert)

Third, some participants also tried to take the interlocutor's personality traits into consideration in their intercultural encounters. As Amelia remarked, she would naturally adopt and unconsciously appropriate ways to communicate with different people according to their different personalities in order to make the communication smoother and more effective. She did the same in intercultural

162

encounters.

Decentering

Decentering refers to suspending judgement and listening to others and responding to them (DiStefano & Maznevski, 2000). Accordingly, decentering is "a skill" and "empathy in practice" (DiStefano & Maznevski, 2000, p. 52). Analysis of the data shows that the skill of decentering can also be used by some expatriates. Amelia, for example, realized that Chinese people might, unconsciously or consciously, have some stereotypical attitudes towards the expatriates so the tactic she adopted was to listen patiently to what the interlocutor said before making a judgement. When asked to give suggestions to new staff at UNNC, she suggested,

> 我觉得还是去多听一下对方，多了解一下对方的思想吧。......不要急于去定论说他这个好或不好，或者说对或者说错。......你要给对方机会，要给自己机会了解对方，进一步的，不要只停留在表面。......如果你真的去给对方一个解释的机会，去听听的话，你可能会发现大部分时间你的这种结论都是错的，不是他的出发点，他做事的动机。所以如果你了解了的话，以后再次跟这一类人去交流的话就有利于你交流的成功和有效了。(Amelia)

> I feel that it is better to listen to them and understand their thought… don't jump to conclusions – good or bad, right or wrong… Give the other a chance to explain, and give yourself an opportunity to understand him/her. This also means trying not to simply believe what it seems to be… When you really give a chance to the other to explain, you will probably prove that most of your impressions are wrong, and whatever you thought is not his/her real motive. If you have a good knowledge of this point, you might have more effective and successful communication with such people afterwards. (Amelia)

Likewise, Herbert actively tackled unrealistic requirements proposed by the expatriates instead of arguing. The purpose was to give the expatriates time and opportunities to reflect on their plan.

> 通常是一个比较积极的去解决问题，不是说他提出来，我就一定argue 或against你，就是我们也是朝着，为了完成一个mission，为了完成一个task，因为这样做的

话他，他也看到你这样努力，在到处去协调，他也会从心里上感觉到那些东西他可能到最后也不是特别特别的很坚持。(Herbert)

We usually try to solve the problems they bring up first rather than argue against them, which means we try to provide help for them to complete a mission, a task, whereby they can see our efforts to coordinate the different departments and might not in the end care so much about the results. (Herbert)

Recentering

DiStefano and Maznevski (2000) propose another more sophisticated skill in intercultural encounters: recentering, meaning "finding or developing shared ground upon which to build a new basis of interacting" (p.53). This skill requires both sides to have a good working knowledge of each other and seek common ground to span the bridge across cultural differences. In this regard, Barbara gave a good explanation:

因为所有人的交流都是双向的，即使我跟一个中国人交流我也有我的style，他有他的style，我们在交流的时候只能够说compromise。那么跟外国人也是一样的。他可能有他的讲话方式，我有我的讲话方式，我表达我的意思，他表达他的意思，但是我会尽量迎合他的理解方式，他也会尽量来迎合我的理解方式，因为这样才会是一个比较effective communication。(Barbara)

Communication is two ways. Even if communicating with a Chinese, I still have my own style, and he/she has his/hers, and thus we only 'compromise' in our discussion. So when I talk with a foreigner (both of us have our own communication styles), we try to understand each other's ways of thinking, which is effective communication. (Barbara)

Similarly, Herbert also mentioned that his way of thinking and communicating was gradually approaching the expatriates' one, which is a subtle process:

对，就是往他们的方向靠近。中国人有中国人的特色。……也有可能长期在这边工作，自己的一个思维方式，或者跟他们的交流方式会靠近他们的一种方式。这是一个潜移默化的过程。(Herbert)

Right, just try to approach their manner. … my ways of thinking or communication

tend to approach theirs probably since I have been working here for a long time and been influenced by the environment. It is a subtle process. (Herbert)

Mediating

The ability to mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena is one of the skills involved in intercultural competence (Barrett, et al., forthcoming; Byram, 1997). This reduces the pressure of real-time interaction and provides opportunities for acquiring more knowledge (Byram, 1997). The data in this study show that helping interlocutors to understand each other can make intercultural communication smoother. For example, Lucy tried to provide support for the expatriates in better understanding the context of the things discussed and thus reducing their negative feelings.

> 很多中方员工跟西方员工交流的时候，会互相blame的，就是you don't understand，you do not get this。但是你得help them，如果你不设法帮他了解的话。我觉得情绪很重要，如果他有了抵触情绪，那就更难了。(Lucy)

> When many Chinese staff communicate with the expatriates, they will blame each other: you don't understand, or you do not get this. But you should help them understand. Otherwise, it will be much harder to tackle the problem once they have a sense of resistance. (Lucy)

This sub-section has so far illustrated how some components of intercultural competence are involved in the processes of intercultural sensemaking and how these components are developed. From the perspective of sensemaking, "people learn about situations by acting in them and then seeing what happens" (Ancona, 2012, p. 10). By "acting thinkingly", people "interpret their knowledge with trusted frameworks, yet mistrust those frameworks by testing new frameworks and new interpretations" (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 412). As a result of this, the sensemaker's knowledge is updated. The data analysis shows that the participants were aware of the self and the other, gradually overcame stereotyping and thereby developed context-specific knowledge through making sense of the situation.

In addition, sensemaking is "about organising through communication" (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 413). The authors further stress that sensemaking "takes place in

interactive talk and draws on the resources of language in order to formulate and exchange through talk". Hence, linguistic application is central in sensemaking. The findings in this study indicate that the participants generally developed their linguistic competence to varying degrees. Furthermore, sensemaking is about "action" (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 412). In order to respond to the situation properly, people have to make full use of the skills they have to tackle the unknown. In fact, the findings here show that the participants developed communicative skills such as empathy, decentring, recentring and mediating.

Last, the development of intercultural competence was closely related to positive attitudes towards unknown situations. The findings suggest that respect and genuineness on the basis of respect are essential in intercultural encounters. Nevertheless, the participants did not emphasize tolerant and open attitudes towards the unknown, as are highlighted in the majority of intercultural competence models (see Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Perhaps, the participants, when engaging in the processes of intercultural sensemaking might have taken for granted their openness and willingness to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty, and hence did not mention them.

To conclude, this subsection has explained how the participants learned from the processes of intercultural sensemaking through their engagement, their knowledge and the skills they possessed. As a result of this, these competences developed. There will be further discussion of the development of these competences in section 5.3. The findings in this sub-section show that cultural differences can provide an opportunity for the participants to improve their intercultural competence. In that sense, this study supports the claim made by several researchers (e.g. Gertsen & Søderberg, 2000; Hoecklin, 1995; Holden, 2002; Morosini, 1998) that cultural differences can be opportunities for organisational learning.

Given the above analysis, I now turn to discuss the third process of intercultural sensemaking: relationship building.

5.2.3 A process of relationship building

Sensemaking is social, as it is influenced by others who are part of the context (Weick, 1995). Simultaneously, sensemaking is enactive of a sensible environment, which means people create their own environment by their action (Weick, 1995). Therefore, harmonious interpersonal relationships become significant in the processes of sensemaking, and especially intercultural sensemaking, since the context in which it takes place is much more complex than among groups of people who share cultural commonalities. Relationship is defined as "the way in which two or more people or groups behave towards and are involved with each other" by the Macmillan online dictionary (2013). It can be seen from this definition that relationships can be viewed at an individual and organisational level. At the organisational level, the quality of the relationship encompasses a number of relational phenomena such as trust, commitment, attachment, working rapport, consensus and conflict (Clark & Soulsby, 2009). Nevertheless, when employing the term "relationship" in this study I focus on the individual level; hence, relationship building here refers to the participants establishing reciprocal interpersonal bonds with the expatriates in daily interaction. The data show that the participants established relationships with the expatriates to different degrees and their relational bonds could be formed in the workplace or outside working hours.

In the workplace, the forms of the participants' socialisation with the expatriates were various. For instance, Barbara sometimes had lunch together with the expatriates at work. Jane shared some family issues related to her baby with her expatriate acquaintances during small conversations on campus. Some participants, such as Rebecca, Robert and Valerie, also provided support for the expatriates in terms of their private affairs, such as by booking aeroplane tickets or providing local travel information, since in general the expatriates did not know Chinese. The above instances show that the participants built relationships with the expatriates apart from the necessary work-based contact, although many of them mentioned that their interpersonal relationships with the expatriates were comparatively simple and that it was not necessary to deliberately build and

maintain relationships with them, as illustrated previously. The contact that took place could be considered as responding to normal human needs in interpersonal contact.

Furthermore, to varying degrees some participants also established friendships with the expatriates on the basis of daily life contact. In addition to socialization at the workplace, the participants also made connections outside work hours. Some participants such as Joseph, Robert, Olivia and Lucy often socialised with their expatriate friends for parties or shopping. Some who had common hobbies could easily bond together. For example, Ted usually went cycling with expatriates, and Lucy liked to go out for dinner with some vegetarian expatriates. As for Valerie, she kept in touch with those expatriates who were able to dance the Salsa (a kind of Latin dance) with her. She felt that it was rather easy to keep in touch with them if they had something in common in life. It can be seen from the above instances that the reason for these participants to bond with the expatriates was mainly common hobbies. In terms of this point, Ted further pointed out why common hobbies were important in interpersonal (intercultural and intra-cultural) interaction. He believed that a common hobby was "an entry point" for the participants to engage in interpersonal contact.

> 大家有同样的爱好比如说打羽毛球，我们会探讨打羽毛球的技巧，那这样探讨起来大家就会有东西谈。可能谈了一次之后你会impress他，他就愿意下次跟你一起再交流，然后一起打球一起切磋就这样。我觉得兴趣爱好是一个切入点吧，不管是跟中方还是跟外方都是一个交流的切入点。(Ted)

> If we have common hobbies such as playing badminton with the expatriates, we may discuss the skills of playing badminton with them. So we have the content for chat. After that, we probably impress them so that they would like to talk with and even play badminton with us later. I think that common hobbies are an icebreaker for communication either with Chinese or the expatriates. (Ted)

Ted's account implies two layers of meaning: common hobbies create common topics for people from different cultures, and through communication people understand each other and thereby kept constant contact. Hence, his account and the above participants' experiences also support the principle of homophily

(Centola, et al., 2007).

In addition to seeking common hobbies, showing concern and offering favours to the expatriates are another way to keep in touch with them in daily life. For example, Jennifer would go to hospital to see expatriates outside work if they were ill. After doing that, she felt that their *guan xi* seemed closer. Besides, offering favours is another way for the participants to get along with the expatriates who need help. From the perspective of Valerie, it was "exchanging favours": expatriates could provide favours for her if she needed them later.

> 那我生活上能帮他们也帮他们，假如我有遇到一些困难我会问他们，他们会很荣幸的帮助我们。我也没有**刻意**的说我帮你，你会回报我这样子。(Valerie)

> If I provide support for the expatriates in life, they will love to help me when I encounter some trouble in life. Of course, I do not **deliberately** say that they have to help me as a reward. (Valerie)

The above accounts show that Jennifer and Valerie applied, consciously or unconsciously, the principles of Chinese *ren qing* and *hui bao* in interaction with the expatriates, although they initially did not expect repayment. Nevertheless, they did feel that the expatriates "*hui bao*" (repay) their "*ren qing*" (meaning favour here) in various forms such as feeling closer and providing help. As such, from the participants' perspective, they felt that their *guan xi* had developed by exchanging favours with the expatriates. In the context of China, interpersonal relationship is usually translated through the well-known Chinese notion of *guan xi,* but the underlying meaning is slightly different. The latter underlines interpersonal reciprocity, trust and interdependencies (Wong & Leung, 2001). In that sense, interpersonal *guan xi* seems to not only exist between Chinese but also among people from other cultures. Indeed, some participants such as Rebecca, Ted and Valerie did mention that they would ask their expatriate acquaintances to proofread their English writing. As a reward, they would of course reciprocate according to their own capabilities.

Nevertheless, *guan xi* in the Chinese context is usually laden with powerful implications (Wong & Leung, 2001). For example, "*la guan xi*" (拉关系；literally

to "pull" *guan xi*) means "to get on the good side of someone, to store political capital with them, and carries no negative overtones" (MacInnes, 1993, p. 346). As mentioned previously, "the primary functions of communication in Chinese culture are to maintain existing relationships among individuals, to reinforce role and status differences, and preserve harmony within the group" (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 6). In other words, harmonious status in interpersonal communication can be attained by appropriate application of *guan xi* (relationship), *mian zi* (face) and power (Chen, 2008).

However, the accounts of the participants show that their *guan xi* with the expatriates had less powerful implications. First, many participants' bonds with the expatriates were relatively superficial, as discussed in the above paragraphs. Second, some got on with expatriates because they had hobbies in common. Third, even those who had a sense of building *guan xi* with the expatriates, such as Jennifer and Valerie, liked to do this for the purpose of work rather than getting something extra from the expatriates. Indeed, the participants generally admitted that their relationships with the expatriates were superficial and their closest friends were still Chinese, although several participants pointed out that it was possible to become close friends. As Ellen, Tom and Fred mentioned,

老实说我好像，虽然有这么多的外籍同事，真正关系非常亲的确实没有。就是说关系就止于这一步。(Ellen)

To be honest, I have few close foreign friends among so many foreign colleagues, which is to say that with them I only have a business relationship. (Ellen)

[工作以外]我还是生活在中国人的圈子里。(Tom)

I still live in Chinese society after work. (Tom)

我由于工作关系跟几个外籍教师保持着比较好的友谊，但也不会经常去联系，有时候想到了发个电子邮件。(Fred)

I do keep friendship with some foreigners due to work, though the contacts between us are occasional emails. (Fred)

Coupled with the above accounts, the participants' perceptions about simple relationships with the expatriates, discussed in chapter 4 (section 4.3.4), also provide evidence for the above reflections from the participants.

Additionally, the above accounts from Jennifer and Valerie can also be linked with an under-developed concept: intercultural responsibility, referring to "a conscious and reciprocally respectful, both professional and personal, relationship among the team/group members" (Guilherme, Keating, & Hoppe, 2010, p. 79). This implies that every member realizes not only cultural differences and similarities, but also develops full and reciprocally demanding professional relationships with members from other cultures (2010). Thus, it goes beyond the notion of intercultural competence, and adds a moral and ethical element (2010). However, I argue that it should be included as a component of intercultural competence because it emphasises the cooperative nature in multicultural professional contexts, especially in the era of globalization. In this sense, intercultural responsibility could be a higher level of interpersonal relationship in the workplace.

To conclude, this sub-section has explained how the processes of intercultural sensemaking entail a process of relationship building among the staff at UNNC, ranging from socialization and friendships to intercultural responsibility.

5.2.4 Conclusions

This section has decoded the processes of intercultural sensemaking in great detail. In the first three sub-sections, I discussed how intercultural sensemaking could be identified as three concurrent processes through which the participants, to varying degrees, constructed their own identity, obtained intercultural competence, and built intercultural relationships in the context of UNNC.

First, in the process of identity construction, the participants constructed their identities by actively responding to changed situations. According to Weick (1995), sensemaking is "never solitary because what a person does internally is contingent on others" (p.40). The findings in this study support this claim. The

evidence shows that the construction of the participants' identities was closely related to and influenced by the interlocutors (in this study, the expatriates). The expatriates were the main part of the environment in which the participants' sensemaking took place. The findings also shows that some functionalist theories, such as Hall's (1976) high-low context communication and Hofstede's (1980) value dimensions, cannot adequately explain the participants' behaviour in a specific context. Thus, these findings call for a need to pay close attention to individual agency in intercultural encounters when engaging in intercultural communication research, as advocated by Holliday (2010) and Piller (2011).

Second, in a process of learning, the participants to some extent developed their intercultural competence, which consisted of positive attitudes, cultural knowledge and intercultural skills, including linguistic competence. The evidence in this study shows that engagement in intercultural sensemaking is crucial in developing these competences. In doing this, the participants realized their lack of context-specific knowledge about cultural others, practised their communicative skills and advanced their positive attitudes towards the unknown.

Last, in a process of relationship building, the participants also built positive relationships with the expatriates in intercultural encounters to varying degrees. The findings show that some participants socialized with the expatriates both in the workplace and outside work and some even developed friendships with them. Furthermore, some could have a sense of intercultural responsibility. The evidence in this study shows that building intercultural responsibility can benefit intercultural interaction in the multicultural organisation.

To conclude, this section has elaborated on the features of the processes of intercultural sensemaking. By engaging in the processes of intercultural sensemaking, the participants constructed their own identities to actively respond to cultural differences between themselves and the expatriates. Meanwhile, their intercultural competence improved to some extent, and their relationships with the expatriates were also established to varying degrees. In that sense, this section answers my question concerning Osland et al.'s (2007) model: why is intercultural sensemaking positive? Furthermore, this section has also decoded the processes of

intercultural sensemaking into three concurrent processes, which were not explored in Osland et al.'s (2007) model. By doing this, I extend their model.

So far, this chapter has discussed the participants' responses to cultural differences. This study supports Osland et al.'s (2007) classifications about individuals' responses to cultural differences. At the same time, I have explored the factors impeding intercultural sensemaking. Also, the findings in this study acknowledge that intercultural sensemaking is a positive response to cultural difference, and engagement in intercultural sensemaking could facilitate the development of intercultural competence to varying degrees. In the rest of this chapter, I explore the relationships between intercultural sensemaking and intercultural competence by making a comparison with Glaser et al.'s (2007) model.

5.3 The outcomes of intercultural sensemaking

In the above two sections, I have identified three types of response to cultural differences, with only intercultural sensemaking being acknowledged as positive and able to facilitate the development of intercultural competence in a multicultural organisation. This section further discusses how intercultural sensemaking contributes to the development of intercultural competence by making a comparison with Glaser et al.'s (2007) model. Before further discussion, I briefly review the concept of intercultural competence and Glaser et al.'s (2007) model.

As discussed in chapter 2, intercultural competence refers to "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientations to the world" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 7). In their latest work, Barrett and his colleagues (forthcoming) go further to point out that intercultural competence is a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied in intercultural encounters in order for an intercultural communicator to:

- understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself;

- respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people;

- establish positive and constructive relationships with such people;

- understand oneself and one's own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural 'difference'.

The above considerations answer the main purposes of intercultural interaction, while this study provides an approach to achieving these purposes through individuals' engagement in intercultural sensemaking in a multicultural workplace. Through intercultural sensemaking, the participants developed their intercultural competence to various degrees.

Glaser et al.'s (2007) model is a transformational model, since it illustrates how people develop their intercultural competence in coping with cultural differences and their own dispositions, and this process of coping with challenge leads to attitudinal and behavioural change, and thus enables them to interact effectively in intercultural professional contexts. Intercultural competence development has various aspects: awareness of the self and the other, various skills (communicating across cultures, acquiring cultural knowledge, sense-making, perspective-taking, relationship-building), and assuming social responsibility. Glaser et al.'s (2007) model was developed mainly for the purposes of education and training. It has not been applied in real workplaces to explain individuals' daily interaction with cultural others, and especially not in the context of China. Thus, I shall discuss the degree to which these components of intercultural competence in their model fit with the practical development of intercultural competence in the processes of intercultural interaction from the perspective of intercultural sensemaking.

First, evidence of the participants' awareness of the self and others and their acquisition of cultural knowledge pervades the two findings chapters of this study. In making sense of cultural differences, the sensemaker is aware of the self and the other (see section 5.2.2).

Second, communicating across culture is the same concept as intercultural

communication, including verbal and non-verbal communication and language awareness (Glaser, et al., 2007). Sensemaking takes place when the sensemaker gives a meaning to a trigger event by drawing on recourse to language and then responses to it. Thus, communication is central in sensemaking (Weick, et al., 2005). To some extent, intercultural communication is more significant to intercultural sensemaking than communication is to sensemaking, as the issue of language becomes more apparent in intercultural encounters. My data analysis in section 5.1.2 shows that poor English ability hindered the participants' willingness to communicate with the expatriates and reduced their self-confidence in their intercultural encounters.

Third, in terms of the acquisition of culture-general and culture-specific knowledge, I have discussed this in detail in section 5.2.2. By engaging in intercultural sensemaking, the participants transfer their general cultural knowledge to culture-specific knowledge. Meanwhile, they are likely to realize their stereotyping and generalizing towards culturally different people.

Accordingly, the above three components of intercultural competence in Glaser et al.'s (2007) model have been supported by the findings in this study. However, the remaining four components of intercultural competence in Glaser et al.'s (2007) model neither fit well with the findings in this study nor are explained in their model, and thus remain open to argument or expansion.

First, sensemaking and perspective-taking are treated as the two components of intercultural competence in Glaser et al.'s (2007) model. The central meaning of the latter is taking others' perspective into consideration in the course of intercultural communication. Perspective-taking includes many elements of intercultural competence such as empathy, flexibility, decentring, open-mindedness and coping with ambiguity (Glaser, et al., 2007). However, Rasmussen et al. (2011) argue that it is a component of sensemaking, since it is an approach for people to explain cultural behaviour. Indeed, the processes of sensemaking take place to cope with ambiguity (Weick, 1995; Weick, et al., 2005). According to the findings in section 5.2.2, intercultural sensemaking entails a series of skills such as empathy, decentering, recentering, and mediating to

different degrees. In addition, flexibility can be manifested in the process of identity construction analysed in section 5.2.1. As for open-mindedness, it is usually subsumed into the attitudinal component of intercultural competence, as in Byram's (1997) intercultural communicative model and Deardorff's (2006) process model of intercultural competence. Therefore, perspective-taking in Glaser et al.'s (2007) model seems a synthesis of the purposes, skills and attitudes involved in sensemaking rather than a single component of intercultural competence, and thus could conflate with sensemaking.

Second, relationship building, as a component of intercultural competence, is listed in Glaser et al.'s (2007) model, but somehow there is no explanation of it at all. The findings in section 5.2.3 show that the participants developed their relationships with the expatriates, ranging from socialization, to friendship, and to intercultural responsibility, in the processes of intercultural sensemaking. Thus, intercultural responsibility could be regarded as a higher standard of relationship building.

Third, the concept of social responsibility is also regarded as a component of intercultural competence in Glaser et al.'s (2007) model, although the authors do not explain this component. I presume that this model is proposed for the purposes of education and training and thus calls for teachers or trainers to be aware of the need to teach students and trainees to have social responsibility when starting or entering in their work careers. Furthermore, individual social responsibility should be expected in any context, and not just that of intercultural organisations. Thus, I prefer not to regard it as a component of intercultural competence.

Last, Glaser et al.'s (2007) model does not mention the attitudinal development of intercultural competence, in which both attitudinal and behavioural change are treated as results of intercultural competence development. However, analysis of the data in this study shows that positive attitudes are one of the prerequisites of intercultural sensemaking. Specifically, my findings indicate that a respectful attitude and genuineness on the basis of respect are crucial in intercultural encounters. In effect, the attitudinal component of intercultural competence is also stressed by many models relevant to intercultural competence (see Spitzberg &

Changnon, 2009, for details). Accordingly, attitudinal development can be considered to be one part of intercultural competence development.

To conclude, in this sub-section I have discussed how intercultural sensemaking fosters the development of intercultural competence by drawing on Glaser et al.'s (2007) model. Further analysis has shown that the processes of intercultural sensemaking entail development of the above components of intercultural competence. Specifically, they are awareness of the self and the other, communicating across culture, acquiring cultural knowledge, intercultural responsibility building, and attitudinal development. Along with sensemaking, the former three components are parallel to ones in Glaser et al.'s (2007) model. In addition, I have developed the relationship-building component into intercultural responsibility, added one component (attitudinal development), and discarded the components of perspective-taking and assuming social responsibility in their model. In doing so, I have developed Glaser et al.'s model in a real professional context, that is, UNNC.

Table 5.1 The Components of Intercultural Competence

In Glaser et al.'s (2007) model	In my findings
Awareness of the self and the other	Awareness of the self and the other
Communicating across culture	Communicating across culture
Acquiring cultural knowledge	Acquiring cultural knowledge
Sensemaking	Sensemaking
Relationship building	Intercultural responsibility
Perspective taking	Positive attitudes
Social responsibility	

Chapter summary

This chapter has sought to answer the core questions: how do HCS respond to cultural differences in intercultural encounters? What factors can impede the process of intercultural sensemaking? What are the outcomes of intercultural sensemaking related to intercultural competence?

The answer to the first question is that the participants adopted either fight-or-flight, or acceptance, or intercultural sensemaking response to cope with cultural difference, which fits with Osland et al.'s (2007) classifications. Nevertheless, this study has expanded their model by exploring the factors behind the former two responses and identifying the processes of intercultural sensemaking in great detail. From HCS's perspective, intercultural sensemaking consists of identity construction, learning, and relationship building. In terms of identity construction, the participants constructed their identity based on the cultural differences encountered in intercultural encounters ranging from ones of daily/work habits, to personality, and to values. As for learning, the participants' engagement in intercultural sensemaking entails the comprehensive application of positive attitudes, cultural knowledge, various skills, and linguistic competence. The findings in this study show that the participants' identity constructions are associated with their cultural backgrounds, their lived experiences, the interlocutors, and the organisational environment. Finally, intercultural sensemaking also contributed to relationship building and even intercultural responsibility building between the participants and expatriates.

The answer to the second question is that the hindrances to intercultural sensemaking are: lack of language proficiency, lower self-esteem, lack of similarity, lack of availability, and perceived communication difficulties. First, a lack of English proficiency as a significant barrier has emerged strongly from the data. It not only impedes the participants' socialization with the expatriates, but reduces their self-confidence in intercultural encounters. Second, lower self-esteem is another hindrance from the perspective of the participants. Apart

from a lack of linguistic proficiency, the participants' work positions at UNNC and the organisational environment also impact on their level of self-confidence in intercultural encounters. Third, a lack of similarity such as a lack of common hobbies and different values also hinders their willingness to get on with the expatriates, especially in daily life. Fourth, personal factors in the participants' lives such as family affairs and their fixed social networks occupied their spare time practically, and reduced their willingness to socialize with the expatriates. Last, regarding the expatriates, some personality traits such as introversion and negative attitudes towards Chinese, for example, ethnocentrism, prejudice and discrimination, prevented the participants from keeping in touch with them.

Regarding the third question, intercultural sensemaking can facilitate the development of cultural knowledge, skills and attitudes. More specifically, these components are awareness of the self and the other, communicating across culture, acquiring cultural knowledge, intercultural responsibility building, and attitudinal development (such as respect and genuineness on the basis of respect). Thus, through a comparison with the components of intercultural competence in Glaser et al.'s (2007) transformational model, I have developed the components of intercultural competence for the participants in this study.

In this and the preceding chapter I have presented the main findings concerning how HCS participants at UNNC communicate with their expatriate counterparts from the perspective of sensemaking. I now turn to the final chapter to conclude and reflect on the contributions of the overall study.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

This final chapter presents the conclusions to the study. First, I revisit the research questions and summarize the main findings (section 6.1). Section 6.2 offers a model of intercultural interaction based on these findings. Subsequently, I highlight the theoretical, practical and methodological contributions and implications of the study (section 6.3) and follow this with my personal reflections on the research (section 6.4). Finally, the limitations of the study and directions for further research are discussed in sections 6.5 and 6.6, respectively.

6.1 Summary of the study

The main focus of this study has been an exploration of how the Chinese staff (HCS) experience intercultural interaction with their expatriate counterparts at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China (UNNC). The study originated from my own intercultural work and study experience and was motivated by my long concern with and engagement in Sino-foreign higher education cooperation. Before collecting empirical data, a review of the existing literature narrowed the focus of the study to an examination of HCS's intercultural experiences from the perspective of sensemaking. Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory offered an theoretical base and Osland and Bird's (2005-2006; 2000) model of cultural sensemaking was employed as the analytical framework for this study. Thus, the following four research questions were formulated:

RQ1: How do HCS perceive cultural differences in their daily communication with the expatriate staff at UNNC?

RQ2: How do HCS respond (in terms of their intercultural communication) to these differences at UNNC?

RQ3: What (intercultural) communication and behavioural factors can impede the process of (inter)cultural sensemaking from the perspective of HCS?

RQ4: How does (inter)cultural sensemaking facilitate the development of

intercultural competence?

A review of the relevant literature on research methodology led to the adoption of a qualitative inquiry strategy from a social constructionist perspective with responsive interviewing as the main method for data collection. A pilot study was conducted before the main data collection. Eventually, 22 participants were involved in the study, which provided rich data for a thematic analysis (presented in the two findings chapters – Chapters 4 and 5).

The key findings related to the research questions are summarised below.

Answer to RQ1: How do HCS perceive cultural differences in their daily communication with the expatriate staff at UNNC?

The data analysis in Chapter 4 suggests that the participants socially construct cultural differences between themselves and expatriates in three categories: personality traits, communication styles, and cultural values. In terms of personality traits, the vast majority of the data can be subsumed in the Five Factors Model (FFM). More specifically, these five perceived personality traits are conscientiousness (showing concern for planning and details); openness to experience (curiosity about Chinese culture and openness to new ideas); extroversion (predilection for partying and assertiveness on public occasions); agreeableness (a concern for daily rituals and being helpful and friendly); and emotional stability/neuroticism (a coexistence of emotional stability on the part of most of the expatriates with the neuroticism of a minority). Nevertheless, the findings also show that FFM cannot explain all the data relevant to personality. Along with the five factors, some other personality traits, such as humour and wit, and tolerance and intolerance, emerged from the perceptions of the participants, although they do not emerge strongly enough to be treated as themes.

With respect to communication styles, the expatriates are generally perceived as being direct in communication style, encompassing linear logic and a person-oriented and self-enhancement style. Nevertheless, an indirect communication style can also be seen in some expatriates, especially in the case

of making negative responses.

As for cultural differences in values, the manifestations also vary. Specifically, in terms of life habits, the participants notice that the expatriates tend to like to go to the pub in their spare time and pay for themselves ("going Dutch") when socialising with their friends, and they prefer to use email to confirm things in the workplace. In addition, the expatriates care about protecting their privacy. Furthermore, the participants feel equal in communicating with the expatriates. In the context of UNNC, subordinates can express their opinions directly and freely, and senior expatriates are inclined to listen to and accept their subordinates' points of view. In addition, the expatriates are generally perceived to focus on matters relating to work rather than on human (emotional) relationships in the workplace (except for a few exceptions).

However, these perceptions are subject to many factors (e.g. the actor's identity, past similar experience, and attitudes and beliefs about the expatriates), and thus the same events can possibly be perceived and interpreted somewhat differently by other Chinese staff in similar positions. For instance, with regard to the expatriates' concern for planning and details, some participants approve while some regard this as a manifestation of a low level of efficiency by the expatriates. Likewise, some participants appreciate the expatriates' concern for courtesy while some feel that it could give rise to interpersonal distance. This diversity of personal perceptions thus suggests a complexity of the subsequent responses to cultural differences.

To summarise, this question has produced answers regarding the kinds of cultural differences noticed by the participants and how they interpret these differences. The aim of exploring RQ1 was to provide understanding of the participants' subsequent behavioural responses in their intercultural encounters, which is in the subject of RQ2.

Answer to RQ2: How do HCS respond (in terms of their intercultural communication) to these differences at UNNC?

The data analysis in Chapter 5 shows that the participants adopt three types of response to cultural differences: fight-flight, acceptance, and intercultural sensemaking, which supports Osland et al.'s (2007) classification of individual reactions to unknown events in intercultural encounters. Osland and Bird's (2005-2006; 2000) model of cultural sensemaking alone is unable to adequately interpret the complexity of HCS's interaction with the expatriates at UNNC. In intercultural encounters, people do not always engage in cultural sensemaking. For instance, some participants in this study tried to insist upon their own ways of responding to a changed environment or to avoid intercultural contact (fight-flight response). Alternatively, they just passively accepted the ways the expatriates behave. The common feature of these responses is that an individual does not change his/her own cultural frame of reference in intercultural encounters. Meanwhile, both a fight-flight and an acceptance response are likely to accompany negative emotions such as anger or fear. In contrast, an intercultural sensemaking response takes the interlocutor's cultural background into consideration and tries to seek understanding of, and to respond to, cultural differences from the perspective of cultural others. Therefore, intercultural sensemaking is a positive response to an unanticipated intercultural event (Osland, et al., 2007) .

Furthermore, the findings show that intercultural sensemaking can consist of three concurrent and intertwined processes, which have been identified as (1) a process of constructing identity, (2) learning, and (3) intercultural relationship building. First, identity construction is essential in sensemaking (Weick, et al., 2005). It is manifested in the processes of interaction with others. On the one hand, who we are influences how we interpret others (Weick, et al., 2005). As discussed in Chapter 4, the participants make use of their own frames of reference and similar past experiences to make sense of expatriates' culturally different behaviour, in the course of doing which their own identity, in terms of their habits, communication styles and cultural values, is also exposed. On the other hand, who we are is related to others (Weick, 1995). Chapter 5 interpreted the participants' responses to the expatriates' culturally different behaviour in terms of their perceptions of the expatriates. For example, on perceiving the expatriates' directness in

communication style, the participants generally adopt a direct communication style themselves to communicate with their expatriate interlocutors. As such, they come across as direct, at least in the context of UNNC. This process indicates that the sensemaker's identity constructions are related to real situations, e.g. interlocutors and social contexts. Second, intercultural sensemaking entails acquiring the necessary cultural knowledge about cultural others, linguistic competence, intercultural communicative skills and positive attitudes to varying degrees (this point will be further discussed under the heading of RQ4.). Last, in the process of intercultural sensemaking, to varying degrees the participants also build positive relationships, such as social ones and even friendships with the expatriates beyond work.

The next research question seeks to explore the factors impeding intercultural sensemaking.

Answer to RQ3: What (intercultural) communication and behavioural factors can impede the process of (inter)cultural sensemaking from the perspective of HCS?

The findings show that there are numerous factors impeding HCS's intercultural sensemaking from their perspective. These hindrances are insufficient proficiency in English, lower self-esteem, lack of similarities (i.e. common habits, conversational topics, and consensual values), lack of availability (i.e. a lack of spare time and no affective needs), and perceived difficulties in communication with expatriates. Each of these has been discussed in section 5.1.2 in detail. Among these hindrances, some derive from the actors themselves (e.g. lack of English language proficiency, lack of commonalities, and lack of availability); some partly result from the organisation, i.e. the unequal salary system at UNNC; and some stem from the interlocutor, i.e. negative attitudes towards the participants, and ethnocentrism, prejudice and discrimination, which prevent the participants from maintaining contact with the expatriates.

Answer to RQ4: How does (inter)cultural sensemaking facilitate the development of intercultural competence?

In identifying processes of intercultural sensemaking, I have tried to discover the relationships between intercultural sensemaking and the development of intercultural competence by drawing on Glaser et al.'s (2007) model. The findings in this study show that engagement in intercultural sensemaking entails the development of an awareness of the self and the other, communicating across culture, acquiring cultural knowledge, and building intercultural responsibility and positive attitudes (such as respect and genuineness on the basis of respect). These can be identified as the components of intercultural competence for HCS at UNNC.

Having answered the four research questions, it is useful to reflect on how these relate to the overall phenomenon of HCS's intercultural experiences on campus, which is discussed in the next section.

6.2 A model of intercultural interaction

Drawing on these answers and the findings that led to them, I am able to develop a conceptual model of the overall processes of HCS's intercultural interaction with the expatriates at UNNC (see Figure 6.1). The new model is derived from Osland and Bird's (2005-2006; 2000) model (see Figure 2.2). It starts with an actor's noticing cultural differences (e.g. personality traits, communication styles, and cultural values) (stage 1). The noticed difference triggers a need for the actor to make an attribution by drawing on his/her identity, past similar experience, and attitudes and belief about the interlocutor (stage 2). Subsequently, an action is chosen to respond to the perceived difference based on the attribution (stage 3). The chosen activity is influenced by the actor's emotional reaction to the noticed differences and the ability to draw on the similarity between the current situation and past similar experience. When negative emotion, such as anxiety and anger, is dominant, the actor tends to adopt a fight-flight or acceptance response, while when the negative emotion is put aside, intercultural sensemaking is most likely to be triggered. Engaging in the processes of sensemaking can to some degree facilitate the development of intercultural competence. The process of intercultural interaction is an ongoing process. There is not a clear-cut start or end.
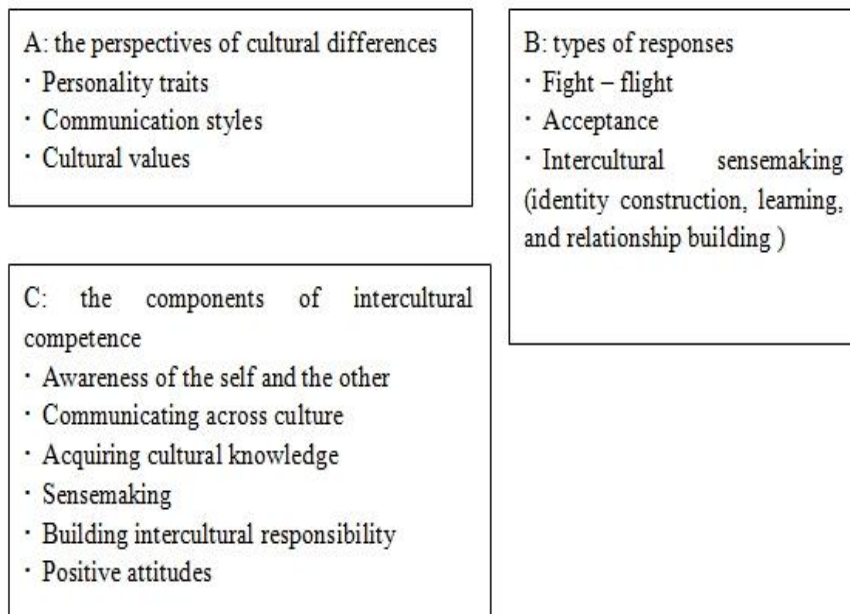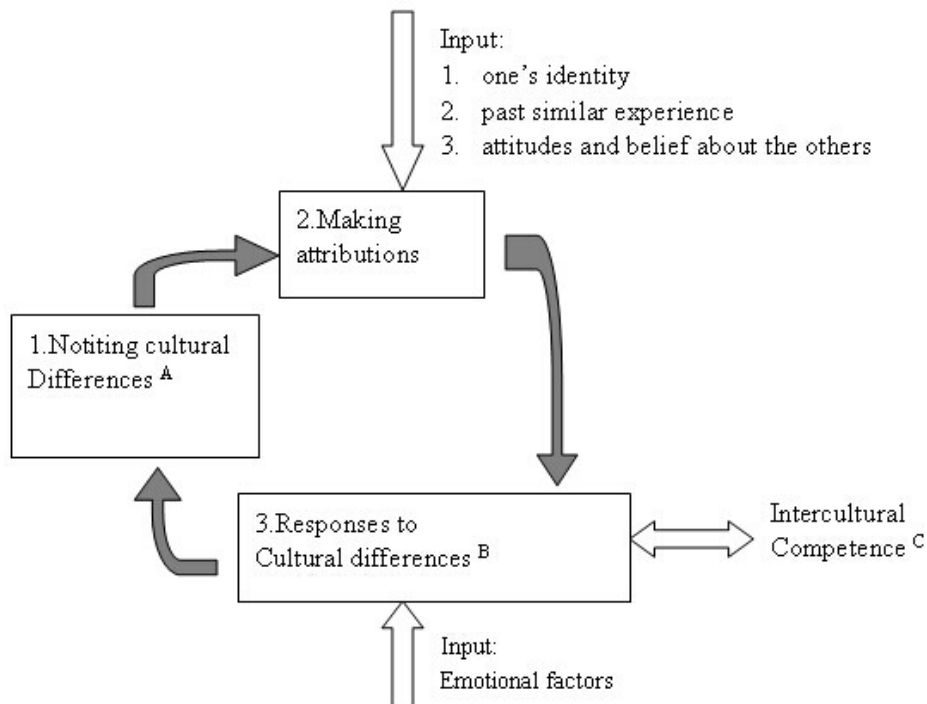
Figure 6.1 A Model of Intercultural Interaction from the Perspective of Sensemaking

The following paragraphs provide commentary on the new model in association with the findings of this study.

Stage 1 Noticing cultural differences

Cultural sensemaking is triggered by noticing cultural differences. The findings in Chapter 4 show that these noticed differences are of three types: personality traits, communication styles, and cultural values (see the answers to RQ1 above). These noticed differences lead to attributions by the participants.

Stage 2 Making attributions

The process of making attributions is complex and subject to the attributor's identity and previous life experience. It is also influenced by the attributor's attitudes and beliefs about the other's identity. These three factors consist of "input" to the process of the actor making attributions. The influence of the actor's identity on attribution pervaded the whole of Chapter 4. In making sense of cultural differences, the participants make a comparison with their own group's general cultural values, personality traits, and communication styles. Meanwhile, the participants' different previous life experiences and attitudes and beliefs about the expatriates contribute to diverse attributions of the same behaviour by the expatriates. Examples of this were presented in section 4.1.1.

Stage 3 Responses to cultural differences

This stage regards the actions selected by the actor in order to respond to cultural differences. Chapter 5 identified three types of response (fight-flight, acceptance, and intercultural sensemaking) chosen by the participants, which coincide with Osland et al.'s (2007) classifications. According to these authors, a fight response means the actor insists on her/his own cultural frame of reference, while a flight response refers to withdrawing from contact with cultural others in intercultural encounters. As for an acceptance response, it means that the participants passively adopt the ways in which the cultural others think and behave. The findings in chapter 5 show that emotion plays a role in the participants' responses to cultural differences. When negative emotions – such as anger and fear – dominate, people tend to select passive strategies (fight-flight and acceptance) to react to cultural differences. The possible hindrances leading to the selection of passive strategies

are numerous, and they have been identified in section 5.1.2. From the perspective of HCS, they are a lack of English language proficiency, lower self-esteem, lack of commonalities, lack of availability, and perceived difficulties in communication with the expatriates.

On the contrary, when people wish to put aside negative emotion and try to seek cultural understanding, intercultural sensemaking is triggered. The findings in section 5.2 suggest that intercultural sensemaking encompasses three concurrent processes: of identity construction, learning, and relationship building. The findings show that the participants manifest their personality traits (e.g. being courteous, being conscientious), communication styles (e.g. directness), and cultural values (e.g. concern for others' privacy) through engagement in intercultural sensemaking, and that these manifestations are related to their perceptions of the expatriates. As for the processes of learning and relationship building, these two processes will be discussed next in association with the development of intercultural competence.

The components of intercultural competence

Intercultural sensemaking involves one's intercultural competence to some degree, as intercultural communication plays an essential role throughout the whole processes of intercultural sensemaking, and meanwhile engagement in intercultural sensemaking can also facilitate the development of intercultural competence. The two-way arrow in the new model indicates this double impact. The participants' interpretations of cultural differences stimulate their awareness of the self and the other. Through engagement in intercultural sensemaking, the interlocutor's cultural knowledge is updated and thus stereotypes are gradually overcome. In addition, intercultural sensemaking entails a series of skills (empathy, decentering, recentering, and mediating) and linguistic competence, as discussed in section 5.2.2. As for building intercultural responsibility, which refers to "a conscious and reciprocally respectful, both professional and personal, relationship among the team/group members" (Guilherme, et al., 2010, p. 79), the findings in section 5.2.3 suggest that some participants are aware of building reciprocal *guan xi* with the expatriate counterparts for the purpose of work.

Regarding attitudinal development, it includes respect and genuineness on the basis of respect, as identified in section 5.2.3.

This model can be used to make sense of how HCS communicate with the expatriates at UNNC from the perspective of sensemaking. Compared with the essentialist models (e.g. Hall's (1976) high-low context communication, Hofstede's (1980) values dimensions, and Ting-Toomey's (1999) high-low context communication frameworks) discussed in chapter 2, the new model considers the impact of both individual factors such as cultural values, personality, attitudes, and emotion, and situational factors such as organisational environment on interpersonal intercultural communication. As such, the new model offers a framework to interpret the complexity and diversity of interpersonal communication in intercultural encounters, particularly in the context of UNNC.

Furthermore, the new model extends Osland and Bird's (2005-2006; 2000) model of cultural sensemaking as a result of deep analysis of the empirical data. However, this new model goes further than Osland and Bird's cultural sensemaking model in three respects. In the first place, it stresses the importance of emotion in the processes of sensemaking. Some negative emotions, such as anger and fear, can lead to fight-flight or acceptance responses to cultural differences, while intercultural sensemaking tends to result from positive emotion. Simultaneously, the new model indicates that intercultural sensemaking can be decoded as three concurrent processes: identity construction, learning, and relationship building. Finally, the new model also highlights the components of intercultural competence involved in the processes of intercultural sensemaking.

In sum, the findings in this study show that it is fruitful to interpret HCS's intercultural experiences from the perspective of sensemaking. The new model illustrates the complexity of interpersonal interaction in a multicultural organisation. It highlights the dynamic and procedural features of intercultural interaction. Although the model is developed from the empirical findings of the current study in the context of a Sino-foreign joint university, it might shed light on other HCS's intercultural experiences in multicultural organisations in China in general.

6.3 Contributions and implications

This study is located in a new organisational form in China (Sino-foreign joint universities), is grounded in a social constructionist perspective, focuses on a neglected group (host country nationals; in this study HCS in particular) in the field of intercultural communication, and makes use of multidisciplinary theories to interpret HCS's intercultural experiences. It has offered insights into how this group of HCS socially construct their everyday realities in their specific context. Thus, it makes a significant contribution to existing knowledge in various ways. This section outlines its theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions.

6.3.1 Theoretical contributions

The theoretical contributions of this study are several. First and foremost, social constructionist theory has enabled me to focus on the participants' individual accounts of cultural differences and their communicative activities in intercultural encounters within the context of the study. This approach has also permitted my active involvement as a researcher in the interpretive inquiry. An inductive approach has driven me to interpret a complex phenomenon (i.e. how HCS make sense of their intercultural encounters with expatriate staff in a Sino-foreign university in China) by integrating different disciplinary approaches, e.g. from intercultural communication, psychology, and cross-cultural management, as no single theory could interpret the participants' intercultural experiences at UNNC. In so doing, the study supports Piller's (2011, p. 94) proposal that intercultural communication at work "can only be understood from interdisciplinary, context-sensitive and complex perspectives" in the context of globalisation and transnationalism.

For example, the findings in this study show that the participants construct cultural differences from three perspectives: cultural values, communication styles, and personality traits. The former two differences have been widely elaborated on in the field of intercultural communication, e.g. Hofstede's (1991) values dimensions and Hall's (1976) high-low communication. However, researchers have not attended to the influence of the interlocutor's personality on

interpersonal intercultural interaction. The findings in this study show the participants pay similar amounts of attention to personality as they do to cultural values and communication styles. This is consistent with Brannen et al.'s (2004) view that any manager addressing global complexity must consider not only the influence of cultural differences and their dynamics but also some universals of personality traits. At the very end of his doctoral thesis, Dao (2011) also calls for attention to be given to psychological aspects of an individual when understanding individual sensemaking in intercultural settings. Thus, this study has responded to Dao's (2011) call by stressing the influence of individuals on interpersonal intercultural communication, specifically by addressing personality factors (as demonstrated in chapter 4).

In addition, social constructionist theory has also enabled me to make sense of the participants' communicative behaviour in several ways. The findings in this study show that the participants' communicative behaviour is constantly shaped by the cultural values imbedded in the process of their own socialisation, the situational elements related to their positions in the intercultural encounters, the interlocutors, and the social backgrounds of all the interactors. This is resonant of Holliday's (2010, p. 259) cultural realist approach, which "not only acknowledges the influence of national structures but also allows for the agency of the individual".

Second, this study has drawn on Osland and Bird's (2005-2006; 2000) cultural sensemaking model as an analytical framework for interpreting the participants' intercultural experiences, and it has offered a specific lens through which to holistically understand the processes of the participants' intercultural interaction. For example, Osland and Bird's model does not deny essentialist work, e.g. Hall's (1976) high-low context, Ting-Toomey's (1999) model, and FFM, which can be used to understand the participants' perceptions and know their limitations. Indeed, the findings in this study show that the above essentialist models were useful in revealing the participants' perceptions about cultural others (see Chapter 4), even though they cannot explain the participants' intercultural experiences in a sophisticated way. A combination of these essentialist models and some Chinese concepts – such as *guan xi*, *ke qi*, and *han xu* – has offered the possibility of

understanding the participants' perceptions of cultural differences. By doing this, this study constitutes a response to Chen's (2011) call for moving beyond dichotomic approaches such as emic vs. etic, East vs. West, and Eurocentrism vs. Afrocentrism or Asiancentrism in communication studies, in an attempt to reach a state of multi-contextual co-existence. It also resonates with Xu's (2011) suggestion to develop truly cross-cultural paradigms to further intercultural competence research owing to the fact that intercultural communication studies in China have long been dominated by Western paradigms.

Third, this study focuses on the side of intercultural communication that is usually neglected: host country nationals (HCNs), in particular HCS here. As such, it contributes empirical research in response to calls by several scholars for greater engagement with HCNs when researching intercultural communication (e.g. Dunne, 2008; Toh, 2003; Varma, et al., 2009; Wang, 2010b). Furthermore, it fills a gap in the field of intercultural communication and cross-cultural management by exploring HCS's intercultural experiences in the context of Sino-foreign cooperative universities. Given the rapid spread of this new form of higher education institution in China, such research is both timely and highly relevant.

Fourth, this study explores the components of intercultural competence HCS need in the real workplace, especially in the context of Sino-foreign joint universities, by drawing on Glaser, et al.'s (2007) transformational model for professional mobility. The findings from the current study offer empirical evidence for some components of intercultural competence (e.g. awareness of the self and the other, communicating across culture, and acquiring cultural knowledge) and also challenge some components (e.g. perspective taking and social responsibility) in Glaser et al.'s model. Meanwhile, the exploration of these components might provide insights for intercultural education and training, especially in the context of China. The components HCS may need to draw on in the intercultural encounters might be applicable in other multicultural organisations in China

Last, as the first study of a social constructionist nature in an increasingly popular context in the realm of Chinese higher education, the study opens new potential for future research to explore intercultural communication between members of

multicultural and multilingual organisations in greater detail. The participants in this study – well-educated Chinese of the younger generation growing up amidst huge economic change and the advance of globalisation – are influenced by both Chinese traditional culture, such as Confucianism, and by so-called western culture (e.g. individualism and low context communication). In other words, their behaviour is shaped by many factors (the organisational environment, socialised cultural values, personality, and the interlocutors with whom they interact). The findings in this study show the complexity and diversity of HCS's intercultural communicative experiences in this Sino-foreign educational organisation, and thus the importance of and need for this kind of research.

6.3.2 Methodological implications

Methodologically speaking, this qualitative study exploring HCS's interpersonal intercultural experiences is useful. Indeed, it is beneficial that I as an insider have investigated HCS's intercultural communicative experiences in this study. In the first place, my insider identity helped me to establish trust and rapport between myself and the researched, e.g. the organisation, UNNC, and the participants. This is essential for a social constructionist researcher due to the co-creative feature of knowledge. Subsequently, the responsive interviews adopted in this study proved to be an effective method for me to understand the nuances of the meanings attached to the words and concepts of those being studied and to fulfil the purpose of exploring the processes of HCS's intercultural interactions. The process of three-stage interviewing allowed me to identify various aspects of the factors that influenced the participants' interpretations of and reactions to cultural differences, e.g. contextual, personal, and cultural. In addition, my own experience, both as a member of HCS and as a sojourner in the UK, aided me in interpreting my participants' experiences in the data analysis stage, as well as perhaps understanding the perspectives of the expatriates, although at times a lack of distance between myself and the participants may have resulted in my overlooking the mundane.

Second, through constant reflection and introspection, my personal

epistemological stance also shifted from positivism to interpretivism in doing cultural research. Initially, my knowledge in terms of culture and intercultural communication was heavily influenced by positivist and essentialist theories such as Hall's (1959, 1976) and Hofstede's (1980), since a great number of studies relevant to culture and intercultural communication draw on these approaches. Following their theories, I tried to find out how Chinese people were different from the expatriates. This original intention implies the following assumption: people from different cultures or nations are necessarily different and can be grouped as cultural types. However, the responses of my participants forced me to revisit my belief about culture and my initial methodological stance. One of the participants directly refused to answer my question about what the differences between Chinese and the expatriates were. He told me that it was not right to generalise about people like that, as people were different from person to person rather than from culture to culture. Other participants placed similar weight on the expatriates' personalities and culture in responding to the above question. This could possibly be a Chinese way of expressing their disagreement with my question since I am older than most of them and they wanted to save my face. As a result of this and the guidance of my supervisors, my epistemological stance gradually shifted from positivism to interpretivism.

Furthermore, the process of communicating with the participants was equivalent to the process of my own learning from them. The participants' intercultural experiences also enabled me to revisit the focus of this study on cultural differences. Indeed, a few participants mentioned that discovering cultural similarity was also important in intercultural encounters, and this has been advocated by some researchers (see Byram et al. (2009)). Accordingly, should I do similar research in the future, I will replace the research question "what are the differences between HCS and expatriates?" with "how do HCS understand and interpret difference (and similarity) in intercultural encounters?".

In sum, the above methodological implications may offer useful insights for researchers planning to engage in similar research.

6.3.3 Practical contributions

In terms of practical contributions, several important issues emerge. First, this study has identified that there are numerous factors hindering HCS's willingness to engage in intercultural communication with expatriates. Some factors concern the organisational environment and ignorance about cultural others. Coupled with these barriers, this study has also highlighted that communication among people from different cultures can facilitate understanding and thereby reduce the potential for misunderstanding. It is true that HCS identified factors perceived as contributing towards feelings of inferiority – such as language, work positions and the influence of traditional Chinese culture – placing them in a different position, and these factors could easily undermine HCS's confidence in intercultural encounters. Nevertheless, the findings in this study show that HCS's engagement in intercultural sensemaking can facilitate the development of their intercultural competence. Therefore, from the organisation's perspective, it is crucial to provide opportunities to encourage communication between HCS and the expatriates so as to facilitate reciprocal understanding among staff in the organisation. In this way, the study responds to the call by Mr Yang, President of UNNC, for reciprocal understanding and learning among people from different cultures in Mei's (2010) article.

Second, this study proposes that attention should be paid to every member in the organisation as the members' behaviour can influence and be constrained by others. Similarly, members of the organisation should be aware of the impact of their own communicative behaviour in creating the organisational environment. The findings in this study show that the participants' responsive behaviour was influenced by cultural others who themselves socially construct – through interactions with others – part of the organisational environment. Likewise, there is research which shows that the behaviour of host country nationals also impacts on expatriates' adjustment in guest countries. For example, Takeuchi (2010) suggests that the breadth and depth of the relationships expatriates have with HCNs are positively related to their adjustment. Also, a study by Toh and Densi (2007) proposes that HCNs' socializing behaviours, such as providing role

information and offering social support to expatriates, can affect the adjustment of expatriates. As such, all people in the organisation are responsible for creating and constraining the processes of intercultural communication in their environment.

Third, Mills et al. (2010) criticize Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory in that it fails to consider the influence of power and context on the processes of people's sensemaking of an organisational event. While Osland and Bird's (2005-2006; 2000) model takes contextual factors into account, it does not address the issue of power in individuals' sensemaking. The findings in this study show that power plays a role in the participants' sensemaking. Most participants acknowledged equality with the expatriates in interpersonal contact in the workplace, but they were also sensitive to a perceived inequality between themselves and expatriates in terms of compensation. This, in association with poor proficiency in English and lower positions, contributed to HCS's low self-esteem in communication with expatriates. Goodall et al.'s (2006) empirical research also shows that perceived inequality contributed one reason for the high turnover rate of HCS in Suzhou Industry Park, China. Therefore, the findings emerging from this study, also evidenced in these earlier studies, point to the importance of building an equal atmosphere in the organisation.

Finally, this study stresses the significance of action, especially in unfamiliar circumstances. The newly-contributed model indicates that making sense of an unfamiliar event, and considering what should be done next, tends to give rise to emotional reactions in a person. Those people who can control their own negative emotions, such as fear and anger, tend to engage in intercultural sensemaking. In doing this, they gradually overcome stereotyping and develop their intercultural competence. The findings in this study show that people learn about and from situations by acting in them. People can never know whether the action chosen is right or not until this action has been done (Weick, 1995). Therefore, in facing an unknown intercultural encounter, one should engage in intercultural interaction and not be afraid to lose face. This is of practical importance to Chinese people, who tend to be influenced by Chinese traditional culture.

6.4 Personal reflections

This project derived from my own work experience as a member of HCS, but the process of fulfilling the requirements of this doctoral research presented new challenges. I encountered the biggest challenge in my life staying in England as an overseas doctoral student. First of all, English was a big barrier for me, as it was for my participants. Although I had worked hard as an administrator in China for eighteen years, my professional career was not related to English at all. As a result, I struggled with English all the time during my study. Sometimes I was very quiet on public occasions in the UK, not because I was introverted, but because I just did not know how to express myself accurately in English. Thus, I completely understood what my participants felt when they described their intercultural communication experiences with expatriates in the interviews.

However, the journey of completing the study was also a process of learning. First, I have learned to understand and explore a phenomenon under research from diverse perspectives. Second, the knowledge I have acquired as a doctoral student and my experience as a sojourner have enabled me to know what I should do in the future when I return to China and continue my work. For instance, both my research and my intercultural experience have enabled me to better understand people from diverse perspectives in intercultural encounters. However, a doctoral project is not sufficient to thoroughly explore a phenomenon due to numerous limitations, but it at least provides me with a direction for further research.

Third, through the research process I have learned how to be reflective in doing research, which is probably the most important gain to light my way in the future. In fact, my whole academic journey could be interpreted using the new model. In doing my own research, the most "unexpected events" I encountered were with my supervisors. Their critiques and comments forced me to revisit my position and my knowledge so as to see what was going on. This process sometimes produced negative emotion such as frustration, hopelessness and fear. Thus, I sometimes insisted on my own views (a "fight" response), or wanted to drop out (a "flight" response). Alternatively, I just passively accepted their comments. However, I eventually adjusted myself to a positive situation and made sense of

and responded to every "unknown" in the course of doing research. Each action to overcome one "unknown" is small, but it was these small actions which drove me to reach the "big" target of completing this thesis. The entire processes of intercultural sensemaking were influenced by the academic environment of Durham University, my colleagues' support and help, and particularly my supervisors' encouragement, supervision, guidance, and conscientiousness. As I reach the end of this study, I realise that I have improved not only my research knowledge and skills but also the way I deal with difficulties. This is important to both my work and my life. Simultaneously, through this process, my identity was constructed; intercultural competence was developed; and a relationship with my supervisors was established.

6.5 Limitations of this study

There is no denying that this study is not without limitations. The main limitation is that the data were collected from one organisation at one particular time. Although I deliberately recruited participants who had been exposed to a variety of intercultural experiences and who had been employed for various lengths of time at UNNC, no evidence has yet been collected to demonstrate that the findings, and the model developed from the empirical research, especially in terms of the development of intercultural competence, can be transferred to all individuals in all Sino-foreign educational institutions over various periods of time.

The second limitation regards the subjectivity of the data. My personal experience at UNNC could bring both advantages and disadvantages in doing the fieldwork. On the one hand, some HCS members I am familiar with helped me a lot in recruiting potential participants and by participating in interviews. During these interviews I felt that we, as colleagues, discussed topics related to our experiences frankly and sincerely. On the other hand, my personal experience could put pressure on some participants I knew but who were not familiar with each other, at least at the beginning of the interviews. For example, one of my acquaintances agreed to be interviewed but did not allow me to record our conversation, although eventually we talked happily and openly. I presumed that she was

worried about whether I might spread her thoughts among the colleagues we had in common, but subsequently the pressure was released because the topics discussed would not cause any trouble. Despite this, I cannot say with certainty that their actual behaviour was exactly mirrored in their retrospective narratives, although I have no reason to believe that any participants were deliberately withholding information.

The third limitation regards the content of the interviews. The focus of this study was on exploring the participants' perceptions of and responses to cultural differences while ignoring the perceptions of cultural similarities. Nevertheless, cultural similarities also co-exist with cultural differences at the same time. Indeed, my participants mentioned that people from different cultures were similar to each other in several regards, such as the need for respect in intercultural encounters and sincerity in intercultural communication. These factors can also facilitate intercultural communication and are thus worthy of exploration.

6.6 Directions for further research

Given the complexity of intercultural interaction in a multicultural workplace and the limitations of the current study, the potential for further research is great.

Firstly, having developed a model to explain HCS's intercultural experiences from the perspective of sensemaking, the model could be further tested by using various HCS groups in various cultural contexts. As stated previously, this study has focused primarily on HCS's lived experiences and intercultural communicative behaviours based on their own narratives. Owing to the subjectivity of individual perceptions, the research findings about HCS's perceptions of cultural others may or may not be accurate. Accordingly, it is desirable to conduct further research which involves both expatriates and host country nationals in order to support or contradict HCS's perceptions articulated in this study. Such research may involve asking HCS to respond directly to the current research findings, or encourage them to reflect independently on their own experiences in intercultural encounters. Furthermore, observational research would be complementary in examining the possible discrepancy between HCS's

retrospective narratives and actual behaviour.

Secondly, given that personality traits have emerged as a major theme in the current study and appear to constitute a key factor in HCS's reactions in intercultural encounters, further research into personality traits as a way of promoting greater understanding of intercultural interaction phenomena is recommended. Indeed, research in intercultural settings is still dominated by national value-based approaches (Dao, 2011). With the frequent mobility of people from different countries and the development of modern communication technology, national boundaries and values are increasingly blurred in the era of globalization. This change likewise calls for a shift in the focus of research from a national culture approach to an individual socially-constructed understanding of culture.

Practically, Van de Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) developed a multicultural personality questionnaire aiming at measuring multicultural effectiveness. In their later paper, they revised the dimensions for Cultural Empathy, Openmindedness (an open and unprejudiced attitude toward out-group members and different cultural norms and values), Emotional Stability, Social Initiative (a tendency to be extravert and to take initiatives), and Flexibility (a tendency to be curious and flexible) (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2001). Their personality dimensions closely correspond with FFM but are practically designed for predicting professional effectiveness in multicultural environments. Obviously, these dimensions are important for an individual sensemaking in intercultural encounters, but unfortunately, I did not realize the significance of personality at the beginning of the research. Therefore, further research could examine the participants' personality by using the above questionnaire before exploring their intercultural experiences, which could shed light on their interaction with cultural others.

And last, as stated in the preceding section, future research can also explore how the participants socially construct and respond to cultural similarities, alongside the exploration of cultural differences.

Conclusion to the study

By providing a detailed description, this study has focused on understanding the processes of the participants' intercultural communication. In doing so, it has contributed to research and practice in several ways. First, it has provided empirical evidence about how HCS experience intercultural communication with cultural others in a multicultural organisation, and has responded to calls for empirical research in the context of China (Hu, 2010). Second, this study has developed a model to interpret the complex processes of intercultural interaction from the perspective of HCS, which is offered as a reference for further examination and development in further research. Meanwhile, the components of intercultural competence developed in this model also shed light on the kinds of competence needed in intercultural encounters, at least in the context of China, for both researchers and organisational communicators. Finally, the study has provided evidence uncovering the complexity of interpersonal intercultural interaction from the perspective of HCNs (HCS here), a neglected group in intercultural communication research, and thus the research outcomes shed light on a potential future research agenda.

Appendix 1: Pilot Interview Guide

Pre-interview discussion points

Informally chat about interviewee's hometown, family and impact of Ningbo city if she/he is not a Ningbonese to build relaxed environment.

Introduce my research proposal.

Introduce the interview process.

Sign research contract.

Interview

1. Opening questions/discussion

Did you have any intercultural study or work experience before coming to UNNC? If yes, explain a few more details.

How long have you been working at UNNC? What drove you to come to work at UNNC? Which department are you working in at UNNC? What position do you have?

2. Main questions

Theme 1: Contact with culturally diverse colleagues

Questions: Do you have contact with expatriates at UNNC? If so, where are these expatriates from? How do you feel communicating with them?

Probes: Can you tell me a successful experience of communicating with expatriates? What did they say? What did you say? What do you think the reasons for it being successful are?

Can you tell me an unsuccessful experience of communicating with expatriates? What did they say? What did you say? What do you think the reasons for it being unsuccessful are? Is it easier or more difficult to communicate with them compared with native Chinese? Why?

Would you consider some staff to be more culturally different to you than others? If so, can you talk to me about this?

Theme 2: Factors facilitating contact with expatriates

Questions: What factors or conditions might facilitate your contact with expatriates at UNNC? How do you make intercultural communication effective?

Probes: Do you think you need any particular skills to communicate with expatriates which you do not need when communicating with native Chinese colleagues? If so, what skills? When do you need them? Do they work?

Apart from _____, what else might facilitate contact with them?

So, overall, the main factors that facilitate contact with expatriates are…?

Theme 3: Factors hindering contact with expatriates

Questions: What factors might hinder your willingness to communicate with expatriates at UNNC?

Probes: You mentioned _____. Could you talk to me a bit more about that? Why is that a factor? For example?

Apart from _____, are there any other factors that might hinder contact? For example?

So, overall, the main factors that hinder contact with expatriates are…?

Theme 4: Conflict management

Questions: Is there any difference between you and expatriates in the way you approach work-related task? If so, how do you cope with these differences?

Probes: Have you experienced any conflict with expatriates? If so, how did you cope with the conflict? Could you please give me an example? (What happened, in what context? the outcomes? In what way did you cope?)

Theme 5: Environmental support for intercultural contact on campus

Questions: Does UNNC promote contact and interaction between culturally different staff? If so, have you participated in any of these events? How successful were they? (i.e. did they result in further intercultural contact for you, for others?) Did UNNC promote such activities further? Why/why not?

If not, do you think it should?

Probes: What suggestions do you have for UNNC to facilitate intercultural communication? What suggestions do you have for Chinese staff to effectively communicate with expatriates?

Theme 6: Adaptation to the multicultural environment at UNNC

Questions: Can you tell me if there is any change or difference you have encountered since you started working at UNNC?

Probes: Are the situations what you expected or anticipated before you came? If so, give some examples of these differences/or different situations. What happened? Who was there? Etc. In what ways did you deal with these differences? What did you find easy/difficult? Are these differences changing with time?

Theme 7: Motivations for intercultural contact

Questions: Do you take the initiative to have contact with expatriates? If so, why? If not, why not?

In general, would you say the expatriates want to have contact with Chinese staff? If so, why do you think they might like to have contact with you?

If not, in your opinion why not?

Probes: You mentioned _____. Could you talk to me a bit more about that?

Theme 8: Relationship between HCS and expatriates

Questions: Do you think it is possible for you to establish friendship with expatriates? If so, how do you establish friendship? If not, why?

Probes: You mentioned _____. Could you talk to me a bit more about that?

Have your Chinese colleagues established friendship with expatriates?

In general, is the relationship between HCS and expatriates closer or not, compared with among HCS? Why?

3. Closing question

What other things would you like to tell me about your intercultural experience at UNNC and the ways you have coped with it? Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Appendix 2: Pilot Interview Guide (Chinese)

采访前讨论要点

非正式聊被访问者的家乡，家庭。如果其不是宁波本地人则问对方对宁波的印象以营造轻松的氛围，和建立彼此间的信任。分享相似和不同的经历，比如海外学习和工作经历。

介绍研究计划，目的和采访过程。填被采访者的个人信息，签同意采访表。

正式采访

1: 开放性问题/讨论

请问你来诺丁汉之前有跨文化学习和工作经历吗？如果有，请谈谈好吗？

请问你来诺丁汉多久了？什么原因驱使你来诺丁汉工作？你现在哪个部门？什么岗位？

2. 主要问题

主题 1： 跨文化联系

提问：你跟UNNC的外教有联系吗？如果有的话，他们来自哪些国家？你跟他们交流感觉咋样？

探究性提问：你能讲一下与外教一次成功的交流经历吗？他们说什么？你说什么？你认为成功的原因是什么？

你能讲一下与外教一次不成功的交流经历吗？他们说什么？你说什么？你认为不成功的原因是什么？

总的来说，跟中国人相比，你觉得跟外教交流是难还是容易？为什么？

你认为有些外教对你来说非常不同吗？如果是的话请简单介绍一下好吗？

主题 2: 探究促进不同文化交流的因素

提问：你认为什么情况下会促进你与外教的交流？你是怎样使得跨文化交流有效？

探究性提问:

当你与外教交流的时候，你认为需要特别的技巧而这些技巧当你与中方员工交流时是不需要的吗？如果有的话，什么技巧？什么时候用得着？它们有用吗？

除了上面提到的_____，还有什么促进因素吗？

这样的话，总的来说，主要的促进因素有:

主题 3: 探究阻碍不同文化交流的因素

提问：你认为什么因素或者情况会阻碍你与外教的交流？

探究性提问: 你提到 _____. 你能讲得详细一点吗？为什么？例如？

除了_____，还有其他因素吗？例如？

所以，总的来说，主要因素有---------？

主题 4: 冲突管理

提问：为完成工作任务，你和外教在方法上有什么不同吗？如果有，你是怎样解决这些不同的？

探究性提问：你经历冲突了吗？ 如果有，你是怎样处理冲突的？例如？（事件经过，背景，结果，你的对策等）

主题 5: 组织对促进不同文化交流的支持

提问：UNNC 对中方员工提供一些支持以促进不同文化交流吗？如果有的话，哪种形式？你曾经参与过吗？ 你觉得效果怎样？（例如那些活动促进员工间进一步联系吗？）诺丁汉有没有促进这样的活动？ 为什么？ 如果没有，你认为

应该怎样呢？

探究性提问: *你觉得UNNC怎样可以做得更好呢？就不同文化交流而言，你对中方员工有什么建议？*

主题 6: 适应性

提问: 到UNNC工作以后，你有什么变化吗？

探究性提问: *这些情况你来UNNC以前预料到了吗？ 如果是，有什么不同？你用什么方法面对这些不同？你觉得容易还是难？这些情况随着时间改变吗？*

主题 7：跨文化交流的动机

提问: 你主动跟外教联系吗？如果有，发生了什么？能举个例子吗？如果没有？又是为什么呢？

总的来说，外教想主动跟中方员工联系吗？为什么？

探究性提问: *你提到 _____. 你能讲得详细一点吗？*

主题 8: 与外教的关系

提问: 你认为外教与中方员工之间有可能建立友谊吗？如果有，怎样建立？如果不，为什么？

探究性提问: *你提到 _____. 你能讲得详细一点吗？中方同事有跟外教建立友谊吗？总的来说，跟中方员工之间关系相比，中方员工与外教之间的关系是更近或更远？为社么？*

3：结束性问题

关于不同文化交流方面，还有哪些做法值得一提呢？你还有什么想与我分享吗？

Appendix 3: Participant Informed Consent Form

Research Title: A qualitative exploration of Chinese staff's intercultural experiences in a specific institution of higher education in China

(The participant should complete the whole of this sheet himself/herself)

Please cross out as necessary

Have you read the letter of introduction to the study?   YES / NO

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and to   YES / NO

discuss the study?

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions?   YES / NO

Have you received enough information about the study?   YES / NO

Have you been informed that the interview will be recorded and   YES / NO

intended use of the recordings?

Do you consent to the use of the recordings for the desired   YES / NO

purpose of the study?

Who have you spoken to? Ms Hongbo Dong

Do you consent to participate in the study?   YES / NO

Do you understand that you are free to accept or   YES / NO

withdraw from the study at any time?

Signed………………………….. Date …………………………….

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) ………………………………………….

Approved by Durham University's Ethics Advisory Committee

Appendix 4: Interviewee Bio-Data Form

Name		Gender		Age	
Department			Position		
Tel No.			Email		
English competence					
Academic background					
Work experience					

Interviewing details

Time		Duration		Place	
Procedure					

Interviewer   Sign_____   Date   _____

Appendix 5: Information Sheet for Research Participants

Dear colleague,

I am an EdD (Doctor of Education) student at Durham University, United Kingdom. I am doing my research project on the Chinese staff's intercultural experiences at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China (UNNC), approved by Durham University's Ethics Advisory Committee. I would like to invite you to join my interviews to accomplish the project. The information about the study will be presented as follows:

The title of the study is:

A qualitative exploration of Chinese staff's intercultural experiences in a specific institution of higher education in China

In this study, I am interested in intercultural interaction among staff in a specific institution of higher education in China. Specifically, the study explores host country nationals' (HCNs) perceptions of cultural differences and experiences of intercultural communication.

The purpose of the interview is to learn about your experiences of communicating with people from different cultures in a multicultural environment, and specifically, at UNNC. I would be grateful if you could spend about one and a half hours in a face-to-face interview with me in the near future. A shorter follow-up interview may happen, subject to the needs of the research. In addition, the interview will be recorded (audio only) so as to facilitate data gathering and subsequent data analysis. After the interview, I will send you the transcription of your interview for your validation and feedback (if necessary). Meanwhile, you retain the right to withdraw from the research at any point. There will be no

penalty for withdrawing at any stage of the research study. Furthermore, every effort will be made to respect your anonymity. For example, all of your demographic details (such as your name, gender and background) and information you provide will be kept anonymous and all of the data will contribute solely to the academic research. The data collected from the interviews will be destroyed within three years of the initial date of collection.

It is intended that the outcomes of this study will help promote greater understanding of intercultural experiences in a multicultural environment from the perspective of HCNs. Therefore, it is hoped that participants, and colleagues at UNNC, may indirectly benefit from participation in the study in the future. I would appreciate your time and willingness if you would consider making yourself available for me to interview you at your convenience. If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to contact me by phone or email.

My phone number: 0086-13605745100 (China) or 0044-7883950757 (UK)

My email: hongbo.dong@durham.ac.uk

Kind regards,

Hongbo Dong

April 2011

Appendix 6: Interview Guide

Stage one: Informal chat

Informally chat about interviewee's hometown, family and impression of Ningbo city if she/he is not a Ningboese to build a relaxed environment as well as trust.

Share something similar and different experience with the interviewee, including points about overseas intercultural experience and prior work experience.

Introduce the research proposal, the purpose of the research, and the interview process.

Fill in the interviewee's bio-data form after signing consent form.

Stage two: Main questions

1: To explore the perception of cultural differences

Questions: Do you have contact with expatriates at UNNC? If so, where are these expatriates from? What contact do you have with each of these people? for what purposes? What cultural differences have you noticed between you and them?

Probes: *What do you mean by that?*

Could you explain further? Can you give an example?

Is there anything else you would like to say about cultural differences?

Questions: What is your reaction toward these differences? (Like or dislike?) Which aspects do you like or dislike? Why? Anything else? Have your perceptions changed over the time or as a result of closer contact?

2: To explore how the interviewee experiences intercultural communication on campus

Questions: Generally, is it easier/more difficult for you to talk to them, compared with native Chinese? Why?

Can you tell me about a successful experience of you or a colleague of yours

communicating with expatriates*?*

> *Probes*: *What happened? What did the two sides say? How did the communication finish up? What happened in the end? What do you think are the reasons for it being successful? Why? Anything else?*

Questions: Can you tell me about a less successful experience of you or a colleague of yours communicating with expatriates?

> *Probes*: *What happened? What did the two sides say? How did the communication finish up? What happened in the end? What do you think are the reasons for it being unsuccessful? Why? Anything else? What did the expatriates think at the time? Looking back, what is your reaction/understanding now? Has it changed? Do you see the experience differently? What will you do next time?*

3: Factors facilitating contact with expatriates

Questions: What factors or conditions do you think might facilitate your contact with expatriates at UNNC? Why? Can you explain further? Can you give me an example? Anything else?

> *Probes: Do you think you need any particular skills to communicate with expatriates which you do not need when communicating with native Chinese colleagues? If so, what skills? When do you use/need them? Do they work?*

> *Apart from _____, what else might facilitate contact with them?*

> *So, overall, the main factors that facilitate contact with expatriates are…?*

4: Factors hindering contact with expatriates

Questions: What factors might hinder your willingness to communicate with expatriates at UNNC? What are the biggest issues for you?

> *Probes: You mentioned _____. Could you talk to me a bit more about that? Why is that a factor? For example?*

>> *Apart from _____, are there any other factors that might hinder contact? For example?*

> *So, overall, the main factors that hinder contact with expatriates are…?*

5: Motivations for intercultural contact

Questions: Do you take the initiative in making contact with expatriates? If so, what happens? Can you give me an example? If not, why not?

In general, would you say the expatriates want to have contact with HCS?

If so, why do you think they might like to have contact with you?

If not, in your opinion why not?

Probes: *You mentioned _____. Could you talk to me a bit more about that?*

6: Self-evaluation for intercultural communication

Questions: Generally, are you satisfied with your experience of contact with expatriates? If so, which aspects? Why? If not, which aspects? Why not? What have you learned in the course of contact with expatriates? Did this experience change you? If so, in which way? Why? Which things can you do better in the future?

7: Environmental support for intercultural contact on Campus

Questions: Does UNNC provide support for local Chinese to A) make contact or B) keep in touch with expatriates? If so, what forms does the support take? What was that like for you?

Probes: *How could things be done better?*

What suggestions can you make for effective communication with expatriates?

Stage three: Closing question

What other things would you like to tell me about your intercultural experience at UNNC and the ways you have coped with it? Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Appendix 7: Interview Guide (Chinese)

第一阶段：非正式聊天

非正式聊被访问者的家乡，家庭。如果其不是宁波本地人则问对方对宁波的印象以营造轻松的氛围，和建立彼此间的信任。分享相似和不同的经历，比如海外学习和工作经历。

介绍研究计划，目的和采访过程。填被采访者的个人信息，签同意采访表。

第二阶段：主要问题

1：探究被采访对象对文化不同性的认识

提问：你跟UNNC的外教有联系吗？如果有的话，他们来自哪些国家？你跟他们中的每一位有什么样的联系？什么目的？你注意到你和他们有什么不同吗？

探究性提问：*你说的-------指的是什么？*

你能解释一下吗？你能举个例子吗？

关于文化的不同性方面你还有什么要补充的吗？

提问：你对这些文化不同的反应是什么？（喜欢或不喜欢？）哪些喜欢？哪些不喜欢？为什么？还有吗？你的这些想法有没有随着时间或者随着跟他们交流的深入而改变？

2：探究被采访者在校园里的不同文化的交流经历

提问：总的来说，跟中国人相比，你觉得跟外教交流是难还是容易？问什么？

你能告诉我你或者你同事与外教交流时一次成功的经历吗？

探究性提问：*发生了什么？双方说了什么？交流怎么结束？最后发生了什么？你认为成功的原因是什么？为什么？还有吗？*

提问：你能告诉我你或者你同事与外教交流时一次不那么成功的经历吗？

探究性提问: 发生了什么？双方说了什么？交流怎么结束？最后发生了什么？你认为不成功的原因是什么？为什么？还有吗？你觉得外教当时是怎么想的吗？你怎么看待这件事？ 这些想法已经改变了吗？ 如果这种事再发生一次，你会怎么做？

3: 探究促进不同文化交流的因素

提问： 你认为什么因素或者情况会促进你与外教的交流？为什么？

探究性提问: 你能解释一下吗？你能举个例子吗？还有什么要补充的吗？

当你与外教交流的时候，你认为需要特别的技巧而这些技巧当你与中方员工交流时是不需要的吗？如果有的话，什么技巧？什么时候用得着？它们有用吗？

除了上面提到的_____，还有什么促进因素吗？

这样的话，总的来说，主要的促进因素有：

4: 探究阻碍不同文化交流的因素

提问： 你认为什么因素或者情况会阻碍你与外教的交流？什么是最主要的呢？

探究性提问: 你提到 _____. 你能讲得详细一点吗？为什么？例如？

除了_____，还有其他因素吗？例如？

所以，总的来说，主要因素有---------？

5: 跨文化交流的动机

提问: 你主动跟外教联系吗？如果有，发生了什么？能举个例子吗？如果没有？又是为什么呢？

总的来说，外教想主动跟中方员工联系吗？为什么？

探究性提问: 你提到 _____. 你能讲得详细一点吗？

6: 对跨文化交流的自我评价

提问： 总的来讲，你对自己与外教交流这样的经历满意吗？如果满意的话，哪些方面？为什么？如果不满意，哪些方面呢？为什么？在这个过程中你学到了什么？这个经历改变你了吗？哪些方同有改变？

7：组织对促进不同文化交流的支持

提问: UNNC 对中方员工提供一些支持以促进不同文化交流吗？如果有的话，哪种形式？你觉得怎样？

探究性提问: 你觉得UNNC怎样可以做得更好呢？就不同文化交流而言，你对中方员工有什么建议？

第三阶段：结束性问题

关于不同文化交流方面，你还有什么想与我分享吗？还有哪些做法值得一提呢？

Appendix 8: The Interview Schedule

Number	Pseudonym	Gender	Location	Date of interview (2011)	Interview duration
1	Rebecca	F	Coffee lounge	12 April	120min
2	Fred	M	His office	12.April	70min
3	Ted	M	Seminar room	6 Oct	65min
4	Mike	M	His office	6 Oct	60min
5	William	M	Meeting room	6 Oct	70min
6	Kelly	F	Meeting room	7 Oct	85min
7	Herbert	M	Meeting room	7 Oct	70min
8	Joseph	M	Staff room 208	12 Oct	60min
9	Olivia	F	Staff room 208	12 Oct	35min
10	John	M	Staff room 208	12 Oct	60min
11	Robert	M	His office	13 Oct	55min
12	Mary	F	A305	13 Oct	40min
13	Ellen	F	Staff lounge	18 Oct	55min
14	Amelia	F	Coffee lounge	18 Oct	120min
15	Lucy	F	Staff room 208	14 / 25 Oct	85min
16	Barbara	F	Her office	20 Oct	45min

17	Jennifer	F	Staff lounge	21 Oct	70min
18	Veronica	F	Meeting room	21 Oct	70min
19	Vivian	F	Her office	21 Oct	85min
20	Tom	M	Seminar room 325	26 Oct	70min
21	Valerie	F	AB119	27 Oct	50min
22	Jane	F	AB119	28 Oct	80min

Appendix 9: Sample Interview Transcript

6 Oct 2011

Interview with William

采访：刚才我们讲过了，这次我觉得还是想了解一下，学习一下你们的跨文化经历。那么你跟诺丁汉大学的外教有联系吗？

被采访：还是有联系的，就是像我们平时工作的这种情况下，我们会很多时候和英国那边的......取得一些联系，有时候是在技术上面的，或者说是在协调上面的，然后比如说有时候我们碰到一些技术难题什么的这些，但是这个在诺丁汉已经实现了，他们有现成的这个就是说经验，所以说在这种情况下，基本上我们会跟他们交流，然后取得一些他们的建议。还有比如说我们在一些议会上面，我们会经常组织开一些会，然后这些会交流一些经验的，在开会之前可能我们还事先要沟通，要约定，然后要定时间，然后就是说各种这些，所以我们平时也在经常做这些基本交流。

采访：你觉得还是跟诺丁汉本部的人联系的多。

被采访：对。

采访：联系的多，比较多。

被采访：对。

采访：这边有没有？

被采访：这边也有，这边应该说大部分和我们联系的那都是可能在工作上，工作上的话主要是，可能在信息系统，比如说电脑，还有比如说我们的这些数字资源，还有比如说我们的邮件系统，就是各方面提供的这些电子信息相关的这些服务，上面遇到的一些困难什么的，然后会和我们取得联系，在这种情况下我们会就是说尽量把它解决，就是这样。

采访：你这样的话，就是外教你知道他们主要来自于哪些地方？

被采访：像我们的外教因为大部分都是......

采访：跟你联系的就是？

被采访：我知道的还是以英国为主，来自于英国的为主，当然也有其他国家，包括印度，中东，还有就是美国其他国家的也有，但是相对比例上来说，大部分还是英国为主。

采访：在这里接触的时间应该也比较长了，你觉得跟我们自己中国人相比，他们有哪些不一样的地方？

被采访：首先我觉得这个，外国人他在交流的过程中，特别注重逻辑思维，就是说我们中国的交流方式来看是比较传统，就是偏儒家学这样子的一个中庸之道，所以很多时候在表达一个事情，表达一个问题的时候比较委婉，然后喜欢从侧面，比如说一个小小的例子，或者讲一个故事，或者从一些侧面方面来表达这个问题，然后这样子就是说在中国大家其实大部分还是能够理解，还是能够听得懂，而且这样子跟中国的文化有关，这样子让人听起来比较舒服。但是在跟老外交流的时候呢，这个就完全不同呢，就是说老外在交流的过程中我发现他们有一个特点，就是一特别重逻辑条理，就是上下必须衔接。如果你用中国的这种儒家思想的这种交流方式去跟他们交流的话，会觉得就是说，他们会觉得听了一头雾水，听不明白。然后像在中国表达一个事情的时候，我们大部分是先讲理由，先把一些理由、道理全部讲明白了，最后再给结论，在国外的时候，我觉得他们交流的时候，大部分是先讲出结果，先判断这个问题是怎么样，然后再讲它的理由，然后这样子一环一环相扣这样子，表达下去。

采访：你说的这个逻辑……

被采访：恩。

采访：先把结果表达出来，然后把原因再列出来，这就是逻辑。中国人刚好相反。

被采访：恩。

采访：那么你觉得除了这个逻辑方面不同以外，还有其他一些什么样的不一样？

被采访：其他方面的话，我觉得首先他们还是大部分人还是很礼貌的，这个礼貌上面我觉得他们还是做的很好，然后如果说是从感情色彩来说，比如说就是说像在国内，然后朋友之间的话可能我们就是说在交流的时候会透露更多的信息，然后非朋友相对来说，就是说不会表达的太多，那我觉得在这些感情方面的话，我觉得中西方的表达方式还是一样的，他们也是遵循这种，就是说这种方式来的。

采访：你说的他们礼貌一点是什么样的概念？

被采访：就是说可能平时带着一些谢谢啊，还有就是说请啊，或者说这种礼貌用语，会

用的更多一些，更耐心一些，不会就是说可能经常出现不耐烦的这种情况。

采访：你觉得跟他们交流的时候，你应该意识到了这个是跟中国人有一些不一样的地方，你觉得这个不一样你的感觉是怎么样的？喜欢或者不喜欢，或者是能接受或者不能接受这种？

被采访：这个可能我觉得就是说当然刚刚我所说的礼貌是从大部分的中国人和少部分的外国人相比，就是说到我们平时生活，如果是仅拿诺丁汉这一小部分人来说的话，那我觉得大家的礼貌程度实际上是差不多的，但是我因为平时接触到的中国人更多一些，所以说我会感觉可能大家这个方面会不会就是说整个中国大部分人会比他们就是说在说话表达方式上面要欠缺，要稍微显得不是……不像他们那么礼貌，是这样子的。

采访：你在这儿工作好几年呢。

被采访：三年。

采访：你自己觉得从刚来的时候感受和现在的感受自己觉得有变化吗？

被采访：如果是从交流的这种方式上来说的话，我觉得当然就是说呆了三年,有很多人都已经认识了，然后就是刚刚我们所讲到的，从感情上来说大家可以说是朋友，然后这样子的话，就是说即使在交流上面也许碰到什么问题呀，有可能是沟通，有可能是当场有些事情可能我们遇到比较棘手什么的，大家都表现一种比较理解的态度，我觉得这个变化是蛮大的。还有我想说一点，在语言的运用上面，语言的运用上面，毕竟我们是属于第二外语，而对他们来说是母语，所以说,大部分的时候我们还是可以感觉到这个差距，而且他们也在故意的用一些比较简单的一种表达方式，就是通俗易懂的表达方式让我们能够理解。然后从他们的角度来感觉我们英语的话,会有一种什么感觉呢，就是说,一有点直白，不是很委婉。然后也不是很礼貌，会有这种感觉从他们的角度来说。

采访：跟他们交流是不是有意识的按照他们的方式跟他们交流沟通，还是我是我，我还是用我的方式跟他们进行沟通？

被采访：对，这个我觉得是来了三年以后一个变化，因为刚开始的时候毕竟学的还是更理论性的，所以说在运用语言上面还是比较，以中国的说话方式翻译成翻译成英文来跟他们交流，但是毕竟语言只是一个沟通工具，就是说在接触了(多了)，慢慢的接触过程中然后逐渐的适应了他们这种表达方式，因为他们的一种就是说这个说话的这种方式来进行沟通，这样大家在交流过程中会更愉快。

采访：你总的来说，就是说，在跟他们交流过程当中，(和)你与跟中国人沟通（相比），你觉得是跟他们交流容易还是跟困难？

被采访：如果相比中国人和外国人……

采访：对。

被采访：这个肯定还是跟中国人交流更容易，因为毕竟是语言，毕竟我本身不是学语言出身的，所以我觉得在语言的运用上面还是没有达到那种程度，就是说能够达到中文和英文能够达到一样的熟练程度，还没有，所以我觉得如果在可以说中文的情况下，我可能也会选择说中文，这样子就是说从脑力劳动——减少脑力劳动。

采访：你能不能回想一下，就是你在跟外教交流的时候，应该也会就是说你自己觉得比较满意的经历。

被采访：还是有的。

采访：举个例子。

被采访：交流比较满意的，我具体的例子我想其实蛮多的，我想起来都是比较小的一些例子，就是说有些时候在有些问题上面，有时候他觉得是一个很麻烦的事情，打电话过来给我，刚开始比较着急，所以说希望是我们立刻去给他解决，但是这个时候我们恰恰有其他事情走不开，这个时候我们就通过跟他沟通，让他详细告诉我到底出现了什么情况，然后后来了解了过后，然后我就是说，因为这个问题对我来并不是很复杂，最后我通过就是说自己的经验然后告诉他该怎么做，最后把这个事情解决了。

采访：通过电话。

被采访：对，就是电话。

采访：这样的事情比较多？有没有面对面有些事情进行沟通，你觉得比较满意的这种情况有吗？

被采访：因为像我们类似的这种事情比较多，如果你说特别满意的，哪一件事的话我觉得不是很有印象。

采访：在工作当中主要还是刚才讲的，虽然有一些事情刚开始大家可能站的角度不一样，你觉得他很着急，你觉得不是一个很严重的问题，那么通过沟通以后很快能解决，这个过程当中你觉得你认为这样还是比较顺畅的喽？

被采访：恩。

采访：原因是什么呢？

被采访：这个一个呢，就是说我们这种事情处理的经验，已经了解了它这个原因所在，所以可以很快的把它解决。二一个呢，当然也是就是说通过沟通，然后让我们的老师很

快的平静下来，因为有些时候他们的确是很着急，然后也没有人，学生也在等，所以这种情况的话让他就是说先不要那么着急，不要那么紧张，这个也是蛮重要的。

采访：这样的角度让他们知道，就是说问题所在。

被采访：告诉他怎么来解决。

采访：这个是很重要，因为这个是跟你的工作有关系。

被采访：对。

采访：跟他们交流过程中，有没有觉得跟他们交流不是那么成功的？

被采访：有，这种也很多，是这样子的，简单举一个例子吧。我们有一个老师，他是华裔，但是移民了，年纪比较大，对于我们这种可能就是说，在信息技术的应用方面可能也是比较滞后，所以说一旦遇到问题，他因为是个急性子，所以说特别着急，特别着急有时候会出现什么情况，他到我们同事地方，他不是平静的把这个问题告诉你，而是去咆哮，而是对你大吼大叫这样子，逼迫你要跟他一起过去或者怎么样，有这种情况。还有就是说，像这种还有也是一个员工，是一个英国人，他也是一个急性子，有些时候比如说我们遇到了突然网络断掉这种情况，怎么办，他可能马上给我们发邮件，你知道邮件我们也不是马上就能看到，然后即使看到了，可能我们要把这个问题解决也需要时间，所以在这段过程中，我也不知道什么样的原因，然后他可能就会不断的发，发一份再发第二份，这样的话最后导致（这样一个情况），如果超过大概一个小时吧，如果没有答复的话，他会把邮件直接发到领导那里去，这种也不是一次，有很多次。因为这个可能跟人的性格有关，所以说这种有时候在你比较懒的去答复他，或者说你还在处理的时候然后他就很着急的，就把这个邮件一发再发，甚至发到领导那里去，这种也有。在沟通上面可能产生一些误会吧。

采访：你面对这样的情况怎么处理的？

被采访：现在呢我们怎么处理呢，就是说现在因为这种针对这些个别的人，一旦他有发邮件或者电话联系，那我们就会及时的给他一个回复，即使我们现在不能处理，我们会告诉他我们正在处理，一般就是说如果隔了一天没有处理好，我们还会继续跟他联系，再告诉他我们正在处理，然后把这个整个一个事情的进度告诉他，让他了解我们并没有忘掉他的邮件或者是问题。

采访：你觉得从他的角度来看，他为什么要把信发到领导那里？

被采访：我觉得可能就是说，从他的角度来看就是说他是不是觉得我们就是说，根本就没有理睬他的要求，对于他的邮件什么的完全没有采纳，或者是没有应答。他本身是一

个很胖的一个人，就是非常胖，基本上胖的走不动了，所以说他每天的事情就是坐在那里不动，所以说一旦没有网络了，或者是有什么问题或者什么的，他就比较着急，然后就是说有时候可能就会催着赶紧把这个事情弄好。再加上可能也跟个人性格有关系吧，因为像他这样子的人，基本上平时很少有人跟他交流，可能性格相对来说，也比较孤僻一点。

采访：这种事情发生了，你觉得从当时你的角度看这个事情？现在咱们在回过头来看，你觉得这两个想法有什么改变？

被采访：这个我觉得不管是哪个国家的人，都是有各种各样的性格的，不可能说这个国家可能发达，可能经济好就是说它的人都是好的，这个人好不好性格上肯定还是有差异的，也不能用好不好概括，性格上有差异。所以说我觉得既然是这种事情发生了，我觉得作为我们这个角色来说，作为我们的职责来说，就是应该避免它再次出现，我们采取的方法针对这样子的老师的话，我们就是说，采取尽可能多的进行沟通，以免造成一些误会。

采访：从你的经验来看，你觉得什么样的因素，或者什么样的情况会促进你跟外教进行有效的沟通？

被采访：当然，我觉得其实面对面的沟通是最好的，因为我们不可能每个人对面对面的沟通，所以说在遇到一些比较急的事情上面，我们会电话直接联系，因为毕竟就是说电话通过 voice 这样子的一个联系的话，大家就是说不管是商量事情的心态上，还是语气上都会平和一些。不会出现一些误会呀，或者过激的一些行为，很容易把一个事情解释清楚。

采访：面对面的交流？

被采访：或者是电话交流，这样子可以很快把一个问题解释清楚，即使不能解决，对于他们来说的话，起码心里面就是说知道这个我们已经在为他们做。

采访：还有吗？有效的沟通？

被采访：这个我暂时可能还没想到。

采访：你觉得跟外教沟通的时候需要什么样的技巧，或者有意识用那些技巧，这些技巧当然跟中国人沟通不需要的，已经提到一点，语言的流利程度很重要的，按照他们的交流方式去交流可能会容易接受一点。

被采访：对，说到这个沟通技巧上面，我简单说一点，稍微题外的一个话题，就是在中国的一个企业里面，同事之间的关系相对来说还是比较平等的，当然不是上下级的领导，

就是同事之间的关系相对来说比较平等的，就是说我们有时候可能会淡化一些职责、责任这些方面的事，会通过就是说感情，然后熟悉程度这样子，大家来共事吧。比如说，假设 A 跟 B 两个人关系好，可能这个事情在整个一个环节流通中，从他这儿走的速度快很多，效率也会高很多，这是中国的一个特色，就是说属于一个人情方面的。

采访：人际关系。

被采访：对，然后在国外的话，这个有点不同，在国外的他们的思考，就是看法里面主要强调的职责、责任 (轻人际关系)，也就是说你自身的责任感，他们在思考问题的时候，不是想着可能我们之间是否熟，你应该快帮我做。他们想的是你既然做了这份工作，你就要尽全职把它做好，我把这个事情交给你，然后既然这个事情是归你的职责范围，你就必须全心全意的把这个事情做好，所以在这种情况下，导致刚刚我们所出现的这种情况，就是在交流过程中，比如说，有些时候我们反应稍微就是说，恢复的稍微晚一点，然后或者说中间没有任何沟通，会导致他们觉得你是不是就是说把这个事情给忘了，或者说直接没有采纳这个请求，然后让我们之间产生一些误会，最后导致了这种就是说可能不是很愉快的事情发生。为了避免现在这种事情，我觉得主要的方法还是多交流，有些时候举个例子，就是说就是一个很小的问题，然后比如说，有的老师过来问我们，比如说某某某东西坏了，打个比方某某某东西坏了，可能我现在在做别的事，没有时间做把这个问题解决掉，大概过了两天我差不多处理完了，把这个事情也解决了，然后我再给这个老师一个答复，然后这个时候实际上他心里面不是很舒服的。

采访：为什么？

被采访：因为就是说他把邮件发给你过后你没有反应，最后突然说好了，实际上他在这个过程中，就是说在接到你邮件之前他不是很舒服的，他觉得你可能是不是落掉了，或者什么了，就是说这个跟人，因人而异，但是会有那么一部分人他不是很舒服的。所以说现在这种情况是怎么样的？不管任何人，他可能有事情过来求助于我们，我们都会给他一个回复，不管是通过 email 也好，通过电话也好，即使我们没有解决，但是我会给他回复，告诉他我们在处理。到后面我第一天给他 email 回复了我说我们在处理，第二天我再告诉他我处理好了，这样做作为他来说他是心里面很舒服的。

采访：在工作当中也是学到的。

被采访：对。

采访：及时的跟他们交流沟通，哪怕你工作没做好，但是告诉你我很重视，我已经在做这个事情。

被采访：是的。

采访：这是很好的例子，还有没有其他的可以促进交流的？

被采访：这个这会儿还没想到。

采访：你觉得什么样的因素会阻碍你跟他们所谓的交流？

被采访：这个当然因素还是有各种的，一个是语言上面，当然语言不是现在对于我来说，我觉得不是最主要的因素。有些时候因为根据人的情况来看，就是说不管是怎么样，就是说肯定还是有跟你熟悉和不熟悉的这样子几种区分，而且再加上刚刚我提到的几个老师，可能他们之前有联系过，那些留下来不是很好的印象，这种情况下肯定心里面会有一些，就是说以前留下过一些不好的印象，但是在这种情况下，比如说遇到这种事的话，可能我们需要更谨慎的，更小心的去处理这些问题。阻碍他们交流的话我觉得……

采访：你跟他们交流？

被采访：我觉得还是不是很多，现在像我们交流的话，还是经常以经常沟通为主。因为刚开始的时候是有那种，就是说可能因为一个事情没处理完或者没结束而不交流，而这个时候心里可能是有一些，比如说一个中国的习惯，可能没做好就不说，二一个,就是说还是就是有一点觉得多此一举的感觉，还有就是可能语言方面还不是很好，所以说各方面，现在来说我觉得交流还是蛮充分的。

采访：你跟他们主动交流吗？

被采访：对，工作上面还是我们基本上还是主动跟他们交流的。

采访：除了工作，生活？

被采访：工作以外的话，生活上，这个要谈到我们这个学校的年龄结构，就是说在我们学校就是说一个是中方员工，二个是外方员工，这个年龄结构上面还是蛮有差异的。像我们中国的话都是年轻人，基本上30出头的是很少了，只有很少一部分是30岁左右的，所以说中方员工非常年轻。

采访：大部分是30岁以下的。

被采访：对，所以非常年轻，而国外的员工，他们就是说基本上都是以40岁以上这样子为主，可能年纪更大的也有，40，50这样子的，所以说这个本身在年龄差异方面可能导致了一些话题不是非常一致，然后再有加上我们，我个人觉得还是有一些就是说，是种族歧视还是说文化差异，反正我觉得即使是中方教书的老师，academic staff，他们之间也很少跟外国的教书的老师进行交流，他们之间的这个交流也不是很多，所以说这个

我觉得可能还是存在一些文化的差异。就是说，这种文化差异导致了最后就分成了很多小团体，然后中国的员工可能跟中国员工交流的多，外国的员工跟外国的员工交流的多，导致了这种情况。

采访：你觉得文化差异导致了中方员工跟中方员工交流比较多，外方员工跟外方员工交流比较多，这些差异能举些例子吗？哪些方面的差异？

被采访：我觉得可能在，一个是表达了这种方式上面，表达的这种方式上面中国人表达的这种方式，就是说刚刚我们也说到了，有几点不同，一个是（外国人）表达的不是很委婉，欠缺，逻辑思维跟他们不同，然后第二个，是话题上面，我觉得可能我们交流最多的话，可能是一些比如说中国的一些日常生活，物价，然后各地的一些特色，就是跟旅游有关系的，跟中国比较知名的一些地点有关系的，这类话题多一点。

采访：工作以外的交流？

被采访：对，工作以外的交流，从他们那里得知的也是比如说英国的一些情况，然后在某个比如感兴趣的产品，或者某一个领域生活消费上，然后还有一些地方的一些比较有意思、好玩的地点，这些交流的相对多一些，真正你说如果在生活上面，比如说我们平时的生活方式是什么样子的，还是有是说饮食习惯、文化这种，再加上历史交流的很少。

采访：你觉得从他们角度，他们想不想主动跟我们中国人交流？

被采访：从他们的角度。

采访：内心上。

被采访：这个我觉得好像这种在慢慢的淡化，就是说一个新来的国外的员工，他是愿意跟你交流的。相对来说比较活跃一点，但是后来呢，就是说一旦他就是说呆上一段时间过后，他会逐渐的减少这种交流的频率，慢慢慢慢地，就是像我们刚刚说的划成不同的小圈子。

采访：他们刚过来的时候愿意跟我们中方员工交流，你觉得他们的交流目的是什么？

被采访：还是跟生活相关的一些事情、事物比较感兴趣。

采访：你觉得总的来讲，你跟外教交流这样的经历你自己满意吗？

被采访：大部分愿意跟你交流的还是比较亲切的，感觉还是愿意大家一起做朋友这样子，可以经常聊天，相当于聊天，还是乐意跟你做朋友的。我觉得大部分这种交谈还是非常快乐。

采访：你的意思就是说跟你关系比较好的外教，这些还是比较满意的。

被采访：对。

采访： 哪些地方不满意？

被采访：基本上因为我跟，工作以外的话题跟外教交流的机会不是很多。因为大部分时间，就是说，可能不是每个人都会说到这种话题上面，然后只有少数的这么几个，所以基本上这几个人都有一个特色，他是比较乐意，比较主动的愿意跟你聊一些其他的话题，然后二一个，我就觉得这几个人相对来说比较开朗，这样子来说的话，这种交流还是让人觉得蛮开心的，比较成功的。如果其他的，回到这个问题上面，其他的不是很主动，然后不是很开朗的这样子的员工的话，基本上我们平时在工作以外的话题上面交流几乎也不是很多。

采访：你在这里工作几年，你觉得跟他们交流过程当中，自己感觉学到一些什么？

被采访：我觉得，其实很多时候国外的外国人他们跟中国的，在很多事情上还是一样的，毕竟就是人嘛，我觉得，一个从感情的角度来看，就是说他也是有分亲密和疏远之说，就是在一些对待友情，对待一些事物的一些看法，还是价值观我觉得还是跟我们差不多的。对一个事物好坏的判断，这些方面我觉得还是有很多共性的。

采访：你觉得自己没有改变过？

被采访：这个改变的话可能我自己感觉不是很多吧，我觉得可能就是说心平气和了很多。

采访：那也是一种改变，这个环境改变了你还是，因为你心平气和也会随着年龄的增长可能也会变，所以你觉得是环境还是？

被采访：环境和时间加在一起的结果吧。

采访：诺丁汉有没有提供一些，就是说为中方员工提供一些支持，让你们可以比较顺利的或者比较有效的跟外教进行沟通的。

被采访：这种其实我们这一块相对少一些，基本上就是说在这一块相当于就是说一个公共的交流平台，或者说这么一个环境学校不是那么重视，所以这一块就是说在目前来说，对于学校来看不是一个问题，所以说，也没有那么多的精力去在这一块进行投入或者说去营造这样子的气氛。这个说白了，还是跟企业文化有关系。现在目前来看的话，诺丁汉还是以对外宣传，就是说扩张这么一个（方面）为主，然后大部分的精力会放在宣传和建设，建设当然是学校的就是说学院方面的建设，学科这方面的建设上面。对于企业文化的营造上面的话，我们相对来说少，包括交流的平台，平时的活动，大家的一些聚餐，就是说各种方面的交流，我觉得相对很少。

采访：你觉得有没有必要提供这样一个舞台？

被采访：我觉得真的，就是说，我个人觉得是蛮有必要的，在很多时候，除了工作以外，生活以外其实有很多事情我们可以共享的，比如说牵扯到一些周围环境的一些新的信息，各方面的一些活动，我们都可以大家通过这么一个平台来共享，找到大家兴趣相投的这么一个小团体，然后来开展一些，这样子（一）就是促进交流，二大家也相互了解，我觉得是蛮有必要的，但现在我们来看的话主要还是，毕竟我们中方员工，我只知道我们这个圈子当中多一些，比如说一些信息共享方面，然后有一些新的各方面，就是生活上面相关的各方面的这些信息自己交流的比较多一些。

采访：你应该在这里是个老员工了，假如说我是一个新员工，马上进入诺丁汉工作，那你对新的员工有什么建议吗？比如说如何跟国外员工交流。

被采访：我自己我觉得建议好像我一下想不起来，因为我可能就是说针对每个人他的不同的兴趣爱好，或者说他的性格，处事方式的这个我是有一些了解的，但是你说在一起进入诺丁汉过后，有比较好的这种建议的话，我一下子还真想不起来。

采访：我们今天主要还是聊的"跨文化交流"这个话题比较多，你觉得还有什么样的可以分享一下吗？经验或者是教训，或者是比较有趣的一些事情。

被采访：其实我觉得，这个简单说一下吧，我觉得在跟人交流上面，抛开表达方式和语言不谈，就是说在交流上面，我觉得跟中国一样还是以相互尊重为主，就是说在基本的交流方式上面，你对人家尊重，人家也会对你尊重，我觉得这些中西方文化是没有什么差别的，所以，现在像我们现在尽量能做好的呢，就是说，相互尊重的基础上，尽量能够通过更好的表达方式然后把它表达出来，让对方感觉到你是在尊敬他的基础上面来进行交流。然后其实我更多的印象中我是碰到了一些困难，在有些时候我即使是本着尊重对方的原则上，还是很多时候会出现困难，就是说交流上面的，在处理事情上的困难，不是说沟通上面的困难，所以说这个因人而异吧，有些事情就是说针对某个人，本来是很简单的一个事情，然后可以很好的处理，但是作为一个要求严格、比较苛刻或者说是比较着急的这种人来说，我们就需要花更多的、更谨慎、更小心，可能需要更多的沟通，有时候可能最后也不是很能够让人家特别满意的结果，这个也是我现在我觉得还是有，比较有困难的存在。就是说有些时候你尊重对方，也根据他的情况你就是说做了很快的答复，然后就是说各方面你都尽量做到最好了，但是最后问题可能不是那么容易解决的，在处理问题上面外国人是比较直的，就是说"行"或"不行"这两种方式，没有说可以换个角度这样子来处理，没有这种方式。所以说，有时候可能问题没那么容易解决，然后我

231

们可能要么是花了很多时间，要么是最后给了另外一个，折中的一种办法，最后就是说即使我们各方面做好的情况下，还是不能满意，所以我觉得这个会不会是这种其他方面的原因造成的？就是说其他方面的原因，当然就是说可能是你不同国家的人，然后可能还是我说到会不会有种族歧视，或者说其他一些原因造成，所以这个我就很难。

采访：及时的沟通了，而且解决了，但最后还是不满意？

被采访：不是很满意，口头上面表达是没有什么问题了，但是就是说通过一些表达方式，他不是特别的满意，只是就是说勉强通过这么一个感觉。

采访：跟你自己对这个事情的看法还是有落差的？

被采访：是的，所以这种问题有时候我就很难理解到底是什么原因引起的。

采访：你觉得从他们的角度应该也是本着他们的角度，从你的角度做的最好了。

被采访：从我们的角度来做，但是从他们的角度是怎么样一个看法，这个我觉得可能我们还不是很了解。

采访：跟这样的一个，就是说，还是有一点误解，这样的误解有没有哪一个国家的人特别的普遍这种情况？

被采访：我觉得他们都有一个这样子的共性，不是因为国籍的共性，就是说他们在对待事情相对来说非常的严谨，要求非常的严格，这个方面有共性，也就是说对一个事情比较追求完美的一个人这样子，所以说有些事情上面，就是说我们碰到了困难，因为不是每个事情都是那么容易解决的，所以有些时候在碰到不是很容易解决的问题上面，我们就可能觉得有点困难，比如说……。

采访：在沟通上所谓的可能是误解也好，或者是不理解还是存在的？

被采访：存在的，肯定是存在的……。

采访：这个事情发生以后也没有进一步沟通，对这个事情？

被采访：一会儿可以问问……，他给我讲的就到这个地方，所以我不知道是什么。

采访：还有其他的吗？

被采访：现在觉得差不多了。

采访：谢谢。

Appendix 10: Node Structure

Appendix 10: Node Structure

An qualitative exploration of intercultural communication

21/12/2013 16:33

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned
Node			
Nodes			
Nodes\\perceptions of differences		Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\Differences in communication styles		Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\Differences in communication styles\directness		No	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\Differences in communication styles\indirectness		No	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in cultural values		Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in cultural values\communicating equally between superiors and subordinates		Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in cultural values\concern for personal space		Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in cultural values\life customs		Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in cultural values\life customs\going Dutch		Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in cultural values\life customs\going to pub		Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in cultural values\life customs\using email		No	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in cultural values\work-oriented interpersonal relationship		Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in personality		No	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in personality\FFM personality traits		Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in personality\FFM personality traits\agreeableness		Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in personality\FFM personality traits\conscientiousness		Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in personality\FFM personality traits\extraversion		Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in personality\FFM personality traits\neuroticism		Yes	None

Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in personality\FFM personality traits\openness to experience	Yes	None
Nodes\\perceptions of differences\differences in personality\other personality traits	No	None

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