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*To all the student and instructor participants*

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## **Abstract**

There are currently several hundred thousand Chinese students studying abroad, yet knowledge about their experiences is mostly limited to anecdote and caricature. This autoethnography provides a more authentic account based on a year-long journey with 27 Chinese international students in four cohorts at a college preparatory institute in Germany. I discuss Chinese student mobility and describe how the fields of educational psychology, second language acquisition, and higher education have traditionally homogenized students from China. In chapters two and three, I explain why autoethnography is ideal for this inquiry and illustrate how engaging with Chinese students as individuals, rather than as a collective entity, deepened my perspective of three situations and events. I then describe the identities, motivations, and social behaviors of several learners, and conclude that the widespread notion that Chinese students are all the same propagates a tradition that frames the West as superior to the East.

# Chapter 1: Western Disorientations

## Introduction

Since China reopened its doors to the West, approximately 3.5 million Chinese students have studied abroad (ICEF Monitor, 2015). Many of these students choose Germany as a study destination. In 1976, there were only 66 Chinese students in Germany (Zhu, 2012, p. 13) and by 2015 that number had expanded to over 30,000 (DZHW & DAAD, 2016, p. 2). Apart from the United Kingdom, the preferred study destinations for Chinese students at the tertiary level in Europe are France and Germany (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2016).

Despite this sustained increase in numbers, what we know about Chinese international students remains locked in an academic discourse that continually attempts to characterize them as a homogenized group of learners (Sit, 2013; Wachob, 2000). When combined with the tendency to represent non-Western learning styles and socialization patterns as defunct, this discourse prevents us from fully understanding the transitions inherent to language learning and study abroad. Most of the literature currently available on Chinese students abroad highlights the linguistic (e.g.<sup>1</sup>, Zhao & Stork, 2010), cultural (e.g., Sun, 2008) and socio-economic (e.g., Li, 2010) shortcomings of the learners themselves, often with drastic results that interpret participation in and completion of a study abroad program as rife with psychological hardships such as identity crises and other emotional problems (e.g., Guan, 2007, p. 26). Most of these works underscore the extreme isolation and difficulties adjusting socially

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, “e.g.” signifies an example of what I am discussing, while the author’s surname alone indicates the work is simply being cited.

(e.g., Guan, 2007, pp. 24-25), and report the difficulties Chinese international students experience in becoming members of the local host community (e.g., Sun, 2010, pp. 107-108).

The tendency to cast all learners from China in a single mold has further consequences. Viewing Chinese international students as a single category incapable of change or variation precludes the possibility that the learners themselves are dynamic and comprise a full spectrum of personality traits and identities. Consequently, our understandings regarding students from China embrace little variation and give rise to extreme caricatures. As demonstrated by Zhou (2010), literature from even Chinese scholars regarding the academic potential of Chinese students in Germany is split between an understanding that they are either elite students or *Müllstudenten* who remain lazy, unmotivated, and never fully adapt (Zhou, 2010). This binary insistence hinders our ability to fully understand the encounters of Chinese international students during their time abroad.

It has been established that the initial transitional phase presents the most challenges (Song, 2009; Zhu, 2012, p. 159). Despite such difficulties, many elements of this phase also potentially enhance intercultural competence (Pan, 2013) when institutional support and understanding are available. We must also learn to transcend a long tradition that identifies Westerners as exhibiting favored learning and personality traits and all Asians as comprising a collective entity that typically lacks these prized characteristics. To that end, this study investigates the living and learning experiences encountered by four cohorts of Chinese students at a college preparatory institute in Germany.

## Background of the Problem

It is a well-established fact that Chinese international students in Germany encounter many personal (Guan, 2007), linguistic (Han, 2006), and academic (Zhu, 2012) challenges. Approximately 30% of Chinese international students successfully complete their degree programs in Germany, while half of international students graduate (Zhao & Stork, 2010, p. 308). Differences between country of origin and study destination exist in academic customs (Luo & Kück, 2011) and influence how most understand their role as students (Sun, 2008, p. 193). Simultaneously, differences abound between accepted academic writing conventions (Holtermann, Jansen, & Dege, 2010; Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2012; Porsche-Ludwig & Chen, 2011, p. 224) and the dynamic between students and their instructors (Sun, 2008, pp. 206-211).

For many, the greatest difficulties lie in contrasting socialization patterns (Guan, 2007, p. 145). The fact that German students and Chinese international students spend money differently on a daily basis and while out shopping (Li, 2010, pp. 87-99) also creates tension when going out. Developing a friendship with an acquaintance in Germany very often requires that both parties invest in the relationship over a substantial period of time, with the relationship often remaining contained between the two individuals who share it. When contrasted with the nature of relationships in China, which expand exponentially to include even individuals one may not know, much confusion can arise. *Guanxi*, the Chinese term for relationship, vividly illustrates the pragmatics of friendship relevant in China:

In human relations, *guanxi* can refer either to the state of two or more parties being connected or the connected parties themselves. . . . In reference to the actual parties involved, a *guanxi* can be an individual . . . or an organization . . . a dyad or . . . a network. . . . *guanxi* operates in different life spheres, so there

are family-, friendship-, political-, and business-*guanxi*. (Chen & Chen, 2004, p. 307)

As this shows, social networks in China rely on an interconnectedness that is not present in most German circles. While this does show a difference in social behaviors, it does not confirm preexisting notions that all Chinese international students form a collective block.

Much like understandings regarding friendship, contrasting approaches to communication make themselves known during attendance at seminars and lectures in Germany. Again, current literature on these differences focuses on surface descriptions, and depicts Chinese students as passive recipients of knowledge while their German counterparts become junior scholars (e.g., Sun, 2008, p. 236). Positing that all Chinese students view their instructors as authoritative, parent-like figures (e.g., Sun, 2008, p. 202) demonstrates what Huang and Cowden (2009) refer to as the overgeneralization that Chinese learners are all passive, regardless of the fact that it is not true in every context (Cheng, 2000). While it may be true that students in Germany are expected to speak out during seminars, and that their counterparts in China may view open dialogue and debate with the instructor as a sign of disrespect (Sun, 2008, p. 264), “keeping silent in class does not mean students do not actively engage in thinking or class activities” (Sit, 2013, p. 37) and rather demonstrates a different approach to learning.

The homogenization of learners from China legitimates interpretations that Chinese learners are passive (Huang & Cowden, 2009; Sit, 2013; e.g., Xu, 2008) and either unwilling or unable to communicate (Zhao & Stork, 2010). When held up against preconceived ideas that speaking is an integral part of learning and an activity in which learners should actively engage (Li, 2012, pp. 276-328), these tendencies carry many

far-reaching interdisciplinary ramifications. Conversing and receiving spoken input have both long been regarded as a “decisively important influence on the formation of . . . mental processes” (Luria & Yudovich, 1956, p. 23), and this conviction has influenced approaches to first (see Oshima-Takane, Goodz, & Derevensky, 1996) and second (e.g., Canale & Swain, 1980) language acquisition as well as educational psychology (e.g., Paulus & Roberts, 2006). Additional studies promote Socratic dialogue and interactive group work as tools to acquire critical thinking skills, even in online learning environments (e.g., Brooke, 2006), and further illustrate the conviction that active dialogue belongs to each phase of the learning process. Concerned educators who wish to unleash the power of dialogue and questioning for learners during instruction can easily find a wealth of available resources and materials. While a noteworthy cause, the insistence that open and interactive discussions take place mainly during instruction often eliminates the possibility that students “approach their teachers outside class” (Sit, 2013, p. 38) with questions.

Contrary to innovative utilizations of the Socratic dialogue in teaching is a long-standing tradition in East Asia that views loquaciousness as detracting from effective learning<sup>2</sup>. Both Li (2012) and Kennedy (2002) discuss how learning is interpreted as an event that builds a person’s ability to think critically, despite the fact that eloquence is not considered paramount in every context. We may not realize, for example, that Confucius “admitted himself that he regarded a glib tongue most difficult to accept” (Li, 2012, p. 297). As a result, we also fail to acknowledge the inherent difference between eloquence and *ren* (仁), a term identifying “the ultimate humane quality that a person

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<sup>2</sup> In her book *Cultural Foundations of Learning*, Li (2012) compares the influence that Socratic and Confucian traditions have upon learning.

can achieve [only] through life-long learning and self-perfection” (Li, 2012, p. 297).

Those who do acknowledge this difference typically do so only to label the Confucian tradition as counterproductive to the demands modern learning requires. Such reasoning leads to the conclusion that:

In order to sharpen their communicative skills, students should aggressively participate in class and group activities. In this vein, “Eloquence may be silver, silence is gold” is another major cultural barrier to the improvement of spoken English. For this reason, discussions, debates, group activities, and the interactions between students and teachers are difficult to be fully utilized. From their childhood, Chinese students have been taught never to “show off” and stand out from the group. A talkative person is characterized by a “weightless” person, especially if you are male. (Xu, 2008, p.84)

As these illustrations highlight, the way we treat speech adheres to Westernized notions and equates Confucian approaches to knowledge as a barrier rather than a resource. We also rely on surface descriptions of classroom situations to construct images of passive and reticent learners regardless of reality (Cheng, 2000). The fact that we reconstruct reserve and restraint to be “various negative features of Confucianism and collectivism” (Xu, 2008, p. 83) brings to light an overwhelming tendency to identify “some desirable characteristic that the self/in-group has and the other/out-group lacks” (Brons, 2015, p. 70). As Brons later demonstrates, this process validates the idea that one group is superior to another group (2015, p. 70)<sup>3</sup>.

Foreign language pedagogy has also shifted towards incorporating more conversation and less explicit training in grammatical concepts. As a result of this preference, learners who employ a more reflective and thoughtful approach to speaking are often misunderstood as lacking a highly prized ability to think deeply and critically

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<sup>3</sup> In a thought-provoking essay, Dirlik (1996) considers why so many non-Westerners contribute to this line of reasoning.



(Sit, 2013). Spontaneous oral expression of thought is lauded as what learning a foreign language is all about: the language user must, above all, be able to speak. Consequently, the instruction of grammatical concepts, memorization of vocabulary, and other elements of instruction have become minimized (e.g., Krashen & Terrell, 1983). The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)'s Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), for example, which emphasizes the productive skill of speaking, continues to grow in popularity. In April 2016, there were 1,000 certified OPI testers worldwide, which shows "a doubling of the number from just five years ago" (ACTFL, 2016). The expansion of this one test alone demonstrates an increasing emphasis on spontaneous speaking above all else. Foreign and second language learners who do not actively engage in conversation are often perceived as lacking in confidence (e.g., Clement, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994), motivation (e.g., Ushioda, 2008), competence (e.g., Han, 2006), and the ability to critically consider issues (Sit, 2013).

Research about the experiences of Chinese international students lacks a holistic view of the learners themselves. Many studies focus solely on the experiences of the learners outside of the classroom and the difficulties they may undergo while integrating into a new social environment. Other investigations highlight issues faced while attending seminars and refer to reticence as an inability to speak or proof that material has not been mastered. While overseas Chinese individuals do not all share the same point of origin, social class, or educational level, and do not comprise a singular, homogeneous group (Groeling-Che & Yü-Dembski, 2005, p. 9), research overwhelmingly seeks to identify a static model representative of the prototypical Chinese learner (Wachob, 2000).

## Statement of the Problem

Current literature persistently frames Chinese students as a homogeneous group of learners, rather than individuals with varying personalities and learning styles. While Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002) do not refute claims that Chinese learners tend to display fewer individualistic traits than their Japanese and Korean counterparts, contentions that all Chinese learners form a mass collective and that they all tend towards passive learning (Huang & Cowden, 2009) demonstrate a continuing rift between previously established notions and a constant reality. As a result of normalizing Western understandings regarding immeasurable and often indefinable concepts, such as classroom participation (e.g., Dörnyei, 1994), motivation<sup>4</sup> (e.g., Clement, Dörnyei & Noels, 1994), and willingness to communicate (e.g., Baker & MacIntyre, 2000), we lose many opportunities for deeper dialogue and understanding. Along with our tendency to highlight affective factors – factors that mainly Western learners enjoy permission to experience<sup>5</sup> – much research has been carried out regarding both good (e.g., O’Malley & Chamot, 1990) and unsuccessful language learners (e.g., Vann & Abraham, 1990). Successful learners are stated as “often willing to appear foolish in order to communicate” (Rubin, 1975, p. 43), a willingness that is later associated with motivation. As Liang (2009, p. 139) discusses, interpretations throughout history label a so-called Chinese politeness as a problematic factor<sup>6</sup> rather than a resource, a tendency that further exposes these trends.

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<sup>4</sup> In chapter four, I discuss motivation in more detail, and illustrate a new way to understand it.

<sup>5</sup> The number of identity studies that describe Western learners is far greater than those that show non-Western learners, although this trend is slowly changing.

<sup>6</sup> Most of the writing on Chinese politeness tends to frame it negatively rather than positively. I contend this tendency is also mirrored in the logic of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) categorization of politeness strategies.

Similar to our overuse of subjective terminology is the propensity to cast any student who does not readily engage in impromptu discussions and debates as either unwilling or unable to communicate. This oversight supports descriptions of Chinese learners as lacking the necessary cognitive and personal requirements of language acquisition, often with drastic repercussions and misrepresentations. As Kennedy points out, “the picture that often emerges . . . is a caricature of rote-learning, memorization, and passivity” (2002, p. 431) and these understandings permeate approaches to Chinese learners who acquire additional languages. One lecture seeks to understand why Chinese and Japanese learners have difficulties with writing tasks by comparing the mind with a computer (e.g., Wegner, 2013) instead of thoroughly inspecting discursive patterns. Another study investigates the reserve of the Chinese learner and ponders the underlying reasons for a seeming inability to speak (e.g., Han, 2006). As Kennedy outlines, many interpret Chinese learners as passive, a tendency that Mitschian (1992) counters through attempting to understand if reticence is a cultural or intercultural problem. These instances confirm an overwhelming tendency to cast all learners from Asia in a single mold (Chang, 2000). Within this mold, Chinese learners are perceived as lacking the valuable critical thinking skills required by Western universities (e.g., Zhang, 2016).

The previous examples highlight an unbridged gap in knowledge regarding Chinese learners, a situation that underscores the tendency to represent all Chinese students as a singular entity throughout. The widespread notion that Chinese learners form a homogenous group and that all individuals in this group are hard-wired differently, suffer from lack of critical thinking skills (e.g., Zhang & Lambert, 2008),

and exhibit an inability to speak demonstrates a failure to objectively consider the origins of these previously established perceptions. More specifically, labeling one's Confucian heritage (e.g., Xu, 2008) or the pragmatics of politeness (Liang, 2009) and reserve as cultural barriers (e.g., Xu, 2008) highlights the failure of scholarly discourse to more critically examine these widely accepted notions. Unsurprisingly, McKay and Wong's (1996) longitudinal investigation of four Chinese adolescent students in California concludes that their bilingualism is often misinterpreted as evidence that the learners themselves are academically challenged, which in turn rationalizes stigmatization. This type of argumentation "endorses and replicates problematic and colonialist assumptions about the cultural differences between 'Western culture' and 'non Western cultures'" (Narayan, 1998, p. 87, quotation marks in original), a development that McKay and Wong (1996) identify as xenophobic<sup>7</sup>.

These biases permeate research in other fields as well. For example, many studies in cultural neuroscience focus on the neural differences between races, often using as points of departure "essentialist assumptions from cross-cultural research" (Mateo, Cabanis, Stenmanns, & Krach, 2013, p. 1). Just as is the case with research regarding Chinese learners, a vast number of these studies unthinkingly uphold implicit and discriminatory descriptions that "fit in a postcolonial, orientalist argumentation pattern" (Mateo et al., 2013, p. 3). Indeed, only a handful of cultural neuroscientists critically examine the concepts of race and culture that form the foundations of their

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<sup>7</sup> McKay and Wong's (1996) groundbreaking longitudinal study demonstrated how the Chinese students they observed were regarded as belonging to a category of remedial students *because of* their bilingual identity. This belief about bilingualism has been mirrored in research since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, despite the fact that only a minority of the world's population is and was monolingual; Bialystok (2009) discusses the development of research in this area and gives a historical perspective.

investigations (Mateo, Cabanis, Loebell, & Krach, 2012). Those who do quickly realize the similarities between recent studies and “an early, colonialist literature [that] attributed cultural characteristics and variations in psychopathology and behavior to deficiencies in the brains of colonized people” (Choudhury & Kirmayer, 2009, p. 263).

As this shows, findings in even the hard sciences are “inextricably tied to the vocabularies and paradigms the scientists used to represent them” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 2). In their seminal overview of 41 experiments using neuroimaging, Mateo, Cabanis, Loebell, and Krach (2012) conclude that they all uncritically utilize paradigms of race and cultural difference when studying brain structure. In much the same way, the vast majority of literature on Chinese learners unthinkingly adopts the preconceived notion that Chinese students form a homogenous block of learners. This demonstrates that “scientific method *per se* does not make it possible for the mind to transcend the skin” (Bochner, 1997, p. 422, italics in original). Researchers should more thoroughly consider their actions and preconceived ideas when carrying out research.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This thesis demonstrates how current understandings of Chinese students uncritically embrace concepts established during colonization. Just as the nascent field of cultural neuroscience has much potential to reverse currently unexamined biases (Choudhury & Kirmayer, 2009), examining my own assumptions regarding the participants in this study contributes to a critical approach to this field of research. While qualitative research methods typically “require researchers to minimize their selves, viewing self as a contaminant and attempting to transcend and deny it” (Wall,

2016, p. 2), I posit that such an omission would have prevented a fuller and deeper understanding of my own researcher bias. Like Sharma, I acknowledge that traditional ethnography grew out of imperialism and that “ethnography as a methodology ... carries with it implicit relations of inequality” (2015, p. 70). In order to foster a deeper awareness of my own behaviors as a researcher, I employ an autoethnographic approach (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

I understand ethnography to be an investigation that considers a group “in a naturalistic setting over a prolonged period of time” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). While the “split between the social sciences and the humanities” influences understandings of what the ethnographic approach entails, “true cultural studies must go beyond an analysis of the text itself” (Gray, 2003, p. 13). Ideally, ethnography analyzes culture “not as an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning” (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). As a result, my approach seeks to have as little influence as possible on events observed. Ethnography, as I understand it, is also “an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, ‘thick description’” (Geertz, 1973, p. 6) and I therefore obtain data from both participant observation and qualitative interviews.

As a method that uses both personal narrative and scientific exploration, autoethnography “is part *auto* or self and part *ethno* or culture” (Ellis, 2004, p. 31). As a result, autoethnography consists of both autobiographical and ethnographic field study approaches. It requires researchers to consider their actions and perceptions while conducting research and allows them to acknowledge their personal experiences as contributions to a growing body of knowledge (Wall, 2006, p. 3). Ellis, Adams, and

Bochner regard autoethnography as “both process and product” (2011, para. 1). This method pushes practitioners to consider their involvement and investigate the underlying assumptions that guide their actions and inquiry.

I aim to fill conceptual gaps in how Chinese students are viewed by documenting a year of shared experiences with four cohorts of Chinese international students at a college preparatory institute in Germany. The self-reflexivity inherent to autoethnography enables researchers to critically examine their own preconceived ideas while conducting research. Autobiographical information merges with observation notes and qualitative interviews, revealing how my preconceptions initially influenced my research method. Participant observation in classes, excursions, and social events further enhances information gained from qualitative interviews. In this year-long study, I explore the changes that occur in both myself and individual participants over time. As such, the “focus of change is on the individual” (Lewis, 2003, p. 54) and I therefore employ longitudinal panel interviews. My research findings consist of both personal reflections and ethnographic information.

### **Primary Research Aims**

This autoethnography compares my interpretations of events with what the participants themselves later narrate and express. One aim of this study is to more critically reflect on my own preconceived notions and document how these previous conceptions change as a result of exposure and reflection. It is true that time spent studying abroad can deepen an individual’s cross-cultural competence (Stephenson, 2002, pp. 85-104), but what occurs when ethnographers also open themselves up to deepening understandings about themselves during research? We know that the first

step in achieving an optimal study abroad experience is a “systematic exploration of the prior learning experiences of participants, their perceived learning needs, and their current level of intercultural competence” (Gregersen-Hermans & Pusch, 2012, p. 27). In much the same way, researchers should also critically reflect on their own preconceived notions of what they are investigating.

My research explores the continuums of my own perspectives and those of the student participants. What influences how I interact with the student participants? In what ways do national and personal identities<sup>3</sup> affect socialization patterns? I initially maintained that because the Chinese participants belong to a collective, Confucian culture, an approach that acknowledges individual personality traits or unique learning preferences would not be effective (see Haag, 2014). This, I thought, is surely what prevents them from ever fully assimilating while learning abroad. I likewise assumed that the national and collective identities of Chinese students result in an inability to acquire spoken proficiency and integration in a foreign host environment.

After many months, I now realize that the Chinese student participants in this study exhibit a multitude of personality traits and display varying learning styles and preferences. I am aware that insisting students adhere to one identity or language is inappropriate and xenophobic (McKay & Wong, 1996). I agree that “assumptions of homogenous language groups with distinct boundaries and of a one-to-one correspondence between language and identity” (Noels, 2013, p. 290) are in error and contend that the ways in which Chinese students in Germany self-identify differ from one individual to the next.

Optimal study abroad programs consider the individual needs of students in light



of their host academic requirements (Gregersen-Hermans & Pusch, 2012, pp. 23-41). For this reason, this study also considers the perspectives of German instructors who work to prepare students for matriculation into an undergraduate program in Germany. My classroom observations highlight my own shifting perspectives regarding instructor participants.

My central aim is to more fully understand how expectations and choices influence perceptions and behavior. I further hypothesize that how I self-identify shifts and evolves, and that these changes influence how I interpret observed events.

### **Significance of the Study**

China currently sends more students abroad than any other country (ICEF Monitor, 2015), yet few institutions have the resources and understanding required to provide a smooth transition for accommodating these students<sup>8</sup>. Popular opinion is that Chinese international students are unwanted and undeserving recipients of a foreign education (Horstmann, 2014). At the same time, many Chinese students who study abroad arrive lacking sufficient knowledge and academic skills to minimize personal and academic hardships while completing a degree program overseas. For many students, this combination results in course or degree completion without the benefits that living fully in the host environment could bring. This further highlights a conceptual gap in knowledge regarding the identities and experiences of Chinese international students.

German as a foreign language and Germany as a study destination continue to

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<sup>8</sup> Belkin and Jordan (2016) discuss the tendency for American universities to recruit large numbers of Chinese students and then segregate them. In these instances, administrators remain unable to view Chinese international students as anything but one collective entity.

gain popularity in China, yet many of these students do not reap the social benefits of learning German and studying abroad. Since 2010, the number of students at the tertiary level in China studying German as a second foreign language has increased by 24% and the same tendency appears at the secondary level, with German increasingly becoming the first European foreign language (Federal Foreign Office, 2015, p. 29). Although Chinese students exhibit an increasing preference to complete a bachelor's and master's degree overseas, the number of those returning to China after successfully completing their education abroad is also on the rise. As of 2012, for example, 70% of Chinese students learning abroad report a wish to return to China after graduation, despite the fact "that they have few advantages over local graduates" on the Chinese job market (Xiaochun & Chengliang, 2016, para. 5).

These patterns – an increased preference for Germany as a study destination and the desire to return to China after degree completion – counter the German government's incentive to integrate international students into the workforce after successful graduation from a German university. The extended time for foreign students to complete a degree in Germany means added cost and resources to the government and individual taxpayer (Michael, 2015, para. 16), and this consolidates a wish to retain at least 30% of international graduates for a period of at least five years as part of the German workforce (Michael, 2015, para. 18). At the same time, a demographic change in Germany requires an influx of young and qualified individuals to maintain economic and social balance (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015, pp. 21-22).

While many universities claim that Chinese students are incapable of adapting and thriving in a Western learning environment, many Chinese international students

report studying under such conditions creates many obstacles that make it difficult to succeed, and Zhu (2012, p. 159) demonstrates that these hardships are experienced most sharply during the first year abroad. This sentiment colors all aspects of study and life abroad, such as uncertainty regarding appropriate academic conventions (Holtermann, Jansen, & Dege, 2010), confusion about socialization patterns (Sun, 2010, pp. 107-108), and an emotional lack of preparedness for study abroad (Guan, 2007). Indeed, these experiences are common for even international students who are studying in the United States (Mori, 2000). What remains missing is a full realization that Chinese students exhibit individual personality traits and the advantages of various learning strategies.

Teaching methodology likewise suffers from a lack of insight into the experiences of Chinese students. Ability in a foreign language enables multilingual language users to achieve their own symbolic competence (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008), an ability that can only be reached when language users are considered as individuals with their own perspectives and experiences. At the same time, all learning environments transform over time into their own communities (Vygotsky, 1978). By emphasizing a communicative approach, foreign language pedagogy often misses the fact that adult learners acquire language through a mix of explicit and implicit instruction (Schmidt, 1990). The impulse to gauge ability and interest solely from a readiness to voluntarily provide answers to elicitations widens the cleft between many language users and their learning environments.

The term elicitation carries several meanings in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). While many limit usage of this term to refer to conversational moves that explicitly ask “the interlocutor to try again” (Ortega, 2009, p. 72), this study

understands the concept under a much broader framework. More precisely, the author understands elicitation to mean “any technique or procedure that is designed to get a person to actively produce speech or writing” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 176). Thus, elicitations are not intimately linked with negotiation episodes such as clarification requests (Ortega, 2009, p. 61) and negative feedback (Lyster & Ranta, 1997), but rather conversation moves that encourage users to produce language. With this understanding in mind, “elicitation” and “prompt” may be used interchangeably.

Through approaching each student participant as an individual with their own expectations and perspectives, this study provides a much-needed glimpse into the lives of the Chinese international student participants involved in this study. This study also works towards more fully illuminating the ways in which researchers have historically handled this topic. As a result, my own personal reflections explore preconceived notions that research typically legitimizes.

### **Summary**

Since the economic and political reforms of 1978, approximately four million Chinese students have studied abroad and, perhaps because of this, “many destination countries, and the institutions within them, have increasingly come to [financially] rely on Chinese students” (ICEF Monitor, 2015). Unfortunately, the prevailing opinion regarding these learners is that they comprise a collective financial category, rather than individuals with singular personality traits and learning styles. I aim to close a conceptual gap that views all Chinese students as a group collective with the same motivations, identities, and personality traits. I jointly consider pre-departure learning expectations and post-arrival experiences to more deeply understand the transitional,

joyful and challenging experiences of the participants. Central to this inquiry is a critical approach to my own views as I conducted this research and how these preconceptions influenced my own behavior as an ethnographer. This chapter has discussed the ramifications of homogenizing Chinese students and the need to critically investigate preconceived notions. The following chapter outlines the methodology used and highlights why an autoethnographic framework is best suited for postcolonial inquiry.

## **Chapter 2: Frameworks**

### **Research Aims**

As I discuss in the first chapter, the literature portrays Chinese international students as unable to think critically (e.g., Zhang & Lambert, 2008) and contends that having a Confucian heritage cultural background imposes a barrier to language acquisition (e.g., Xu, 2008; Wang, 2013). It also demonstrates a tendency to represent all Chinese learners as a homogenous group (Kennedy, 2002, p. 442; Sit, 2013; Wachob, 2000). The popularly held belief that all Chinese international students are undeserving and incapable recipients of a foreign education (see Horstmann, 2014) also feeds into these ideas. This inquiry's central aim is to highlight how such traditionally held notions hinder the emergence of a fuller portrait of the learners themselves.

I explore my own initial impressions of the Chinese student participants and by documenting how those perspectives affected interactions and shifted due to exposure and self-reflection. How do I relate to the Chinese participants in the beginning and how do my own behaviors as a researcher evolve? In what ways do the identities – both personal and collective – of the participants change throughout two semesters? With these two questions in mind, I embark on this autoethnographic exploration.

### **Research Design**

I understand autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para.1, italics in original). For this reason, my description of research findings merges first-person accounts with third-person descriptions of events and interview data in a discourse that

typically discusses research findings in the third-person. My documentation uses personal reflections from social events, classroom observation notes, and interview data gathered through several rounds of interviews with student participants. I will combine these three sources of data into a readable narrative to present my research findings on the identities, motivations, and socialization patterns of the student participants. The conceptual shift that pushed me to think of the participants as second-person individuals, rather than a single abstract entity, contributes to a discussion that critically considers previous research on this topic.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I have chosen to describe my research findings in the form of an autoethnography for many reasons. Traditional qualitative research methods typically do not encourage researchers to write their own selves into the study (Bochner, 1997). Over time, this amounts to a growing body of knowledge founded on previously documented premises, and results in studies that may or may not critically examine whether those basic foundations are themselves accurate. As a result, many research practices regarding Chinese international students simply employ, rather than question, an understanding that these learners all share the same collective identity incapable of change or variation. Consequently, current practices related to Chinese learners require a thorough examination of the preconceived notions upholding them. As Sharma points out, “academic knowledge and curriculum practices are tied to who we are and how we think as teachers, students, and researchers” (2013, p. 87). In order to more deeply understand my interactions with the participants, it is necessary to first understand my own initial conceptions.

The paradigmatic differences between collectivistic and individualistic groups is a well-used trope often used to account for the differences between Western and Asian societies (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002), yet it is unfortunately not the only one. Instead of tapping into the wealth of resources made available by additional approaches to knowledge, we also choose to disdainfully speak of differences between passive and active learners (Kennedy, 2002, p. 434; Tran, 2013, pp. 57-58). The notion that one's Confucian heritage defines all Chinese learners is misled (Wang, 2013) and carries the implicit undertone that the pragmatics of politeness imposes problems for communication (Liang, 2009).

Lack of reflexivity has loomed at the center of teaching and research practices regarding this topic for a considerable length of time. Westernized teaching materials were initially imported into Chinese learning environments, where they were used regardless of the local context (Reinbothe, 1992, pp. 240-245). Properly contextualized teaching materials were subsequently created, yet still relied on Westernized teaching methods in a foreign context<sup>9</sup>. This is apparent as early as the implication of the direct method (Hess, 1992, p. 103) and continues to the present with an insistence on the communicative language teaching method (e.g., Huang, 2006), even when utilizing modern technology (e.g., Yang, 2014). Instead of investigating why such methods may not work in every context, we describe either the local culture as lacking or the learners themselves as incapable.

It is also crucial to realize the roots of traditional ethnography. The longitudinal aspect of ethnographies allows researchers to portray subtle changes that occur in

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<sup>9</sup> Huang (2006) discusses the issues this causes from the standpoint of local instructors.



participants over time and how these changes are related to environment and setting. However, ethnographies emerged from a colonial tradition (Clair, 2003, pp. 3-28), a development that symbolizes the power imbalance that can occur between ethnographers and study participants (Sharma, 2003, p. 83). I agree that “traditional ethnography as a colonial enterprise is a misrepresentation of ‘other’ cultures that reinforces the oppressive power relations between dominant and subjugated peoples” (Sharma, 2003, p. 92). This implicit inequality creates potential barriers between ethnographers and participants.

In this study, I question an age-old paradigm that all Chinese learners share the same collectivistic identity – a description far too simplistic – and one that limits us from more fully exploring the experiences and perspectives of Chinese international students. For this reason, carrying out a traditional qualitative inquiry would not have sufficed. Interestingly, qualitative research on Chinese learners of German has focused on problems encountered in teaching German in China since the beginning of the twentieth century (Reinbothe, 2007, pp. 54-67). Today, the same challenges are attributed to deficiencies inherent to Chinese contexts. We continue to frame all learners from Asia in a single group, even when speaking of instances in which the students outperform Westerners in assessment tasks (Ho, 2009), and we still disdainfully refer to teaching methods in local contexts as a “traditional book-centered, teacher-centered . . . grammar-centered” (Huang, 2006, p. 184) instruction. As these examples show, qualitative research related to Chinese learners would benefit from the self-reflexivity that autoethnography encourages.

Autoethnography pushes researchers to be self-reflexive, while other methods encourage researchers to appear as neutral as possible (Bochner, 1997). Despite their being a “perceived lack of neutrality and objectivity, which is always expected of more traditional research” (Dyson, 2007, p. 37), I see the self-reflexivity that this methodology encourages as a strength. I do not see autoethnography as “narcissistic substitution” (Delamont, 2009, p. 51) for sound research and rather view it as a way to enhance, rather than detract from, the credibility of research findings. I also contend that neutrality and objectivity have long been lacking. We just didn’t self-reflect enough to see it.

The number of studies that employ quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews on Chinese individuals is abundant, yet the bulk of them still relies on a combination of vaguely defined concepts and surface understandings. This phenomenon makes itself apparent in many studies in the emerging field of cultural neuroscience. Neuroimaging technologies, for example, now investigate issues such as cognitive processes in supposedly collectivistic brains (e.g., Wang et al., 2011) and explore the influence of race on thought and emotion (Malinowska, 2016). As this shows, a lack of objectivity permeates current research, despite the personal distance typically claimed by researchers.

My experiences in carrying out this research project have transformed my thinking. Participation in classroom instruction, social events, and school excursions with Chinese users of German for two semesters was the impetus behind the change in my perspectives. During this time, I also lived in a row of dormitory buildings on the outskirts of the city that houses many of these same students. These decisions gave me

the chance to witness many of the transitions that occur during the first two to three semesters of study abroad. Regularly updating a personal journal prompted these growing realizations. Long-term contact with study participants likewise enabled me to consider changes in identity and how my perspectives transformed over time.

### **Data Collection**

I collected the data using several methods. Participant observation in classroom lectures and later social events played a central role. I documented interactions between the students and their instructors during class sessions. After each classroom observation, I compiled personal reflections using the salience hierarchy (Wolfinger, 2002, p. 89), which means I noted events that struck me as important. I did the same directly following participation in social events and school excursions in a separate journal designated for that purpose. I conducted two to three rounds of interviews with both students and instructors, and kept notes throughout each interview for future reference.

### *Setting and Time Frame*

The majority of this research was conducted at a college preparatory institute located in a mid-sized city in Germany during the 2015-2016 academic year. All the student participants are preparing to matriculate into a German undergraduate study program. I chose this research site for participant observation because the majority of the students are studying abroad for the first time and participate in content courses taught in the target language. As a result, the participants' experiences reflect the initial phases of the study abroad experience. Instead of limiting my study to those students wishing to study economics, a top choice for Chinese international students in Germany (Zhang, 2015, p. 15), I carried out participant observation in both humanities and

economics core classes so that I would experience a more complete range of learner types. Appendix A shows the participant observation schedule for both semesters.

In the Winter of 2015 (S1), I attended lectures with first and second semester cohorts focusing on economics (E1 and E2) and two cohorts preparing to study humanities (H1 and H2). In the second semester (S2), I participated mainly in classes with the original H1 and E1 cohorts. Halfway through S2, I extended participant observation to school events and social excursions with both E1 and H1.

### **Contact with Participants**

The contact with all student and instructor participants followed protocol approved by the IRB. I presented potential student participants with a copy of the informed consent form. I also notified participants of my desire to include outside excursions with the oral consent form. Those participants who did not agree to this extension are not included in my discussions of these events.

I made the potential risks and benefits of participating in the study clear to both student and instructor participants before each initial interview. Participation presents minimal risks to all the participants involved, and the potential harm of participation is not greater than any event normally faced in daily life. I also emphasized that they could stop or withdraw their participation from the study at any time, and reiterated this in each subsequent interview. I was careful to approach student participants for interviews when no instructors were present so they would feel comfortable declining my request to interview them. Likewise, I approached instructors when their colleagues and supervisors were not present. Before I began each interview, I informed each participant of their right to decline answering any question. I also safeguarded the confidentiality of

each participant by encouraging them to adopt a pseudonym, and emphasized their right to decline being quoted or contacted in the future.

### *Student Participants*

I initially came into contact with the participants through participant observation in classes. After several weeks of participant observation, I approached the students with a copy of the oral recruitment script and asked them if they would participate. The student participants were given a copy of the informed consent form. Before each initial interview, I reviewed the informed consent form and made sure there were no questions or concerns regarding participation.

A first round of interviews was carried out with a total of 27 Chinese student participants (median age: 21). I came into contact with all the student participants from attending classes alongside them. Thirteen of the 27 accepted invitations for a second interview, and eight of the original 27 completed three rounds of interviews. Out of the 27 students interviewed, seven were male, as most of the Chinese students in classes observed are female. Eighteen of the student participants plan to study economics after gaining admission into a German university, and the remaining nine hope to focus on the humanities. I also conducted interviews with three non-Chinese student participants. Out of the three interviewed, only one came from a Western country. I carried out these interviews to gain a more complete sense of the classroom dynamic.

### *Instructor Participants*

In addition to conducting interviews with the 30 student participants, I carried out individual hour-long qualitative interviews with three instructor participants. I contacted the instructors in May and June of 2016 to request interviews. The first interview was recorded and explored their career choices and expectations of students

(Appendix D). In the second interview, I carried out member checks to make sure that my interpretations were correct (Guba, 1981) and discussed any items I might include in the thesis. As the second interview was an informal conversation, I did not record it.

### **Revisions**

Interviews with student participants was carried out either individually or in smaller groups, depending on students' preferences. My central aim of the first qualitative interview was to more fully understand the reasons for studying in Germany and how these motivations affected social behaviors and learning styles. I conducted an initial pilot study of the first interview using a list of open-ended questions in hour-long qualitative interviews with student participants in the second semester. Over time, it became apparent that approximately half of the participants interviewed had previous German learning experience in China, while the other half did not. I realized during these initial interviews that whether or not they had learned German in China greatly influenced motivations and expectations, and therefore included questions related to this in my second draft of interview questions.

Halfway through S2, I extended participant observation to include out-of-class interactions. Soon after, I came across literature related to autoethnography. This approach encourages researchers to consider themselves as both the subject and object of their research (Granger, 2011, pp. 88-90). When I looked back at my observation notes and personal reflections, I realized the necessity of self-reflecting on my actions and inquiry.

## **The Interviews**

The interviews were conducted in either a reserved room or at a café frequented by students. Appendix B lists the questions used in the pilot interview carried out with second-semester students (n = 10), and Appendix C shows the questions as used for the remainder of the students in the first interview. I wanted to discover the ways in which the student participants regarded their identity and thought of their roles as students, and how this affected their choice of friends in Germany. I intended to document why they had decided to study in Germany. I also posited that these factors greatly influence socialization patterns.

The second and final rounds of interviews with student participants were conducted during S2. During these interviews, I carried out member checks to ensure that I had understood and interpreted the initial interview correctly. The second interview checked my perception of classroom events and, later, of events that occurred outside of class time. Member checks, or making sure that one has interpreted data correctly, are extremely important for qualitative researchers as a proven strategy to enhance the credibility of findings (Guba, 1991, p. 80). The majority of questions for the third interviews were based on shared experiences or content from previous interviews. Through this, I gained a sense of what was important to each student participant, what their lives were like, and what kind of socialization patterns they typically followed.

## **Research Limitations**

My communication with the student participants was initially limited to a classroom setting, and interviews with both student and instructor participants were

scheduled around a rigorous exam schedule and school holidays. The number of students interviewed more than once significantly dropped as a result. Interviews with instructors took place in the second semester and therefore only occurred with a limited number of instructors. While I participated in school excursions and social events in the second semester, these more informal interactions were limited to E1 and H1. In the second semester, I began receiving invitations to attend these events, while I did not receive such invitations in the first semester. It must also be noted that I did not participate in all lessons of the courses observed due to time constraints.

It became more difficult to write class observation notes during the second semester, and this was even more so after my interview interactions extended to the instructors themselves. After increasing my communication with students and instructors, my presence became more visible in the classroom. While my informal interactions with the student participants became much more open in the second semester, I reduced in-class participant observation. In future studies, it may be helpful to limit the number of courses observed to allow for a more thorough understanding of each classroom dynamic.

In addition to constraints with taking notes and communicating with others, there were also limitations regarding interview scheduling and possible issues with the language used. In the second semester, students must pass two week-long rounds of internal exams as well as the *Feststellungsprüfung* (FSP), the results of which determine university admission. Interviews in S2 were arranged around these extremely important assessments. The language used for all interviews except for one was German, as the student participant was preparing for an English exam and wished to speak in English. I



posit that, through the use of the same lingua franca in most of the interviews, the student participants and I were able to find common ground that would not have otherwise been present.

### **Research Rigor**

I have observed Feldman's (2003, pp. 27-28) four guidelines for enhancing the credibility of autoethnographic research. He maintains that autoethnographers should explicitly state how data are collected and how "representation is constructed from our data" (Feldman, 2003, p. 28). Triangulation should be expanded to include not only multiple types of data, but also more than one way of viewing the same data (Feldman, 2003). I believe the true "value of triangulation lies in extending understanding" (Ritchie, 2003, p. 45) and therefore understand triangulation to mean embracing multiple perspectives of events and situations. I likewise believe that autoethnographers share a responsibility to demonstrate positive changes brought about by the study's findings (Feldman, 2003, p. 28).

I collected data as outlined in the procedures section. In the following two chapters, my representation of this data will offer several readings of each event experienced. I describe the situations and events as they occurred, and offer a traditional viewing of events by referring to themes found in the literature. I will also demonstrate how I initially perceived the situation and how my own perspectives changed as a result of member checking and self-reflection. An emphasis that each situation and event can be viewed from many angles forms the main focal point of my research findings.

Using the metaphor of a journey, subsequent readings and interpretations of the same events will represent changes brought about through a simple shift in perspective.

For each event and situation reported, I shift perspectives after gaining valuable background information and, through this, illustrate the changes that can occur when we reflect on our initial preconceptions and gain multiple ways of interpreting events. This conceptual shift will not only highlight my own growing realizations, but also show how perspectives can change to include deeper understandings of Chinese international students and learners. I end with a personal reflection on how my perspectives changed.

### **Ethical Considerations**

As Bochner and Ellis narrate, “most qualitative research raises ethical issues far more complicated than those covered by procedural rules” (2016, p. 138).

Autoethnography is prone to breaches in confidentiality, particularly in the telling and retelling of stories (Chang, 2008, p. 68, as cited in Tolich, 2010, pp. 1599-1600). For this reason, I have followed Tolich’s (2010) advice for safeguarding the rights of the participants. The strategies he outlines fall into the three categories of consent, consultation, and vulnerability (Tolich, 2010, pp. 1607-1608).

Tolich (2010) outlines that researchers must respect the autonomy of participants while conducting research and that all participants therefore have the right to decline consent to participation and withdraw former consent at any time. In much the same way, the consent of the participants should be confirmed throughout all phases of the research process. Consent should be obtained before the composition of the manuscript, rather than retroactively. Autoethnographers should not publish anything they would be hesitant to show the participants themselves (Tolich, 2010, p. 1607).

In addition to the protecting participant autonomy, researchers have a responsibility to respect the vulnerability of both themselves and the participants

through the use of several strategies. Autoethnographers should be considerate of the internal confidentiality of the participants as well as the fact that they remain permanently linked to any autoethnography they write. Participation in research may not be harmful, and researchers should take all measures possible to minimize risk. Lastly, autoethnographers should “assume all people mentioned in the text will read it one day” (Tolich, 2010, p. 1608). In following all of these guidelines, I have preserved my study from the ethical pitfalls of autoethnography.

### **Summary**

As this chapter has demonstrated, I have chosen to employ an autoethnographic approach based on what is lacking in literature related to Chinese learners. I followed IRB protocol, and situated interview content within a larger context that considered classroom observations as well as social events and school excursions. Through member checking, prolonged engagement, and triangulating three sources of data, I have ensured the credibility of the study (see Guba, 1981). I have also adhered to Feldman’s (2003) guidelines while carrying out this research project.

This chapter has discussed my theoretical framework and explained the procedures used to gather and represent data. The following chapter presents situations encountered during participant observation and demonstrates how a deep reading of such events leads to a more accurate understanding. Chapter five displays a portrait collection of several learners to further show why a single reading of identity and motivation is in error. I will conclude the thesis with additional information concerning my own involvement with the participants and how I, as the researcher, both affected and was transformed by this year-long ethnographic project.

## **Chapter 3: Taking the Journey**

In this chapter, I recall a classroom lecture, a school excursion, and a social event I encountered during the 2015-2016 academic year and reflect on how my perspectives on these three situations changed as a result of time and self-reflection. I explain my initial preparation for this project and explore how prolonged engagement (Creswell, 1998), use of multiple sources (Patton, 1999, p.1193), and self-reflection (Guba, 1981) enhanced my understanding of these situations and events. Personal reflections, background readings, and interview transcripts combine to form this narrative. I report my experiences as an autoethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) and compare initial and present perceptions.

### **Preparing for Departure**

I was proud of the study proposal that I had submitted. After teaching English for several years at universities in Beijing and Shijiazhuang, and acquiring German throughout the course of adulthood, I felt more than certain that I was the ideal person to investigate the experiences and transitions of first-time international Chinese students in Germany. At the heart of my efforts was a burning desire to know the answer to one question in particular: Why do Chinese international students remain amongst themselves while completing a degree program overseas? I had seen large groups of them on their way to attend classes in the mid-western American town where I was completing graduate coursework, and knew they spent the majority of their time outside of class speaking to one another in Chinese.

I had listed segregated housing and the fact that many Chinese international students are privately funded as possible causes behind their separation. I was aware

that one apartment complex in particular housed a disproportionately high number of students from China, and that the living conditions there were considered subpar compared to typical living standards for student accommodation. Perhaps the students did not choose to live there, and instead simply ended up where it was affordable and a manageable walking distance to campus. It not only provided housing for just over \$1,000 a semester but also offered residents the option of renting furniture at a minimal cost. My reasoning combined what I had seen in the United States with what I knew about English-language programs in Germany:

“Many international students at American universities live in segregated housing, and this separation is even more pronounced in Germany, where many English-only programs have allowed a further linguistic separation.” (Bryant, 2014-2016)

The proposal was accepted and I arrived in Germany on July 28, 2015 to participate in a two-month German language course before I matriculated as a visiting graduate student in October of the same year. As part of the graduate course, I read extensively about the challenges Chinese international students face while completing coursework at universities in Germany. I realized that the reserve of Chinese users of German is regarded as a communication barrier in Germany (Sun, 2010; Zhao & Stork, 2010), and felt compelled to explore the reasons behind what scholars commonly label as the passivity of Chinese students and a so-called inability to speak.

I identified an optimal research site where I could carry out the project, and was delighted when my request to be a participant observer at a college preparatory institute in the former East Germany received positive feedback. My discussion with the director convinced me that I should not only participate in first and second semester classes with students preparing to study economics (E1 and E2), but also attend selected courses

geared towards preparing students to complete an undergraduate degree in the humanities (H1 and H2). I took the advice and consequently discovered that the language skills needed for humanities majors required a much higher level of proficiency than that needed to study economics or science, something that has been discussed extensively in the literature (see Zhu, 2016, p. 67). Participating in both economics and humanities core classes likewise enabled me to make contact with Chinese international students with a range of interests.

In December of 2015, I began inviting students in each of the four cohorts to interviews, and conducted a pilot round of interviews in German with 10 second-semester students planning to study economics (E2). I wanted to understand the interplay between identity and socialization patterns, and arranged the questions to begin finding the answer (Appendix B). I realized through the first round of pilot interviews that whether or not the participants had studied German in China before their arrival in Germany played a huge role in their motivations and affected how they approached German language instruction in Germany, and revised the questions to give adequate consideration to whether or not the participants had learned German prior to arrival in Germany (Appendix C).

In May of 2016, I extended participant observation to excursions and social events. By that time, I had identified a core group of student participants and started extending interactions with this group beyond the classroom. I began receiving invitations for outside school excursions and social events, which I immediately accepted. I also carried out three hour-long, individual qualitative interviews with instructors who taught several of the courses I was taking part in, and followed up with

a second interview during which I carried out “member checks, that is, testing the data with members of the relevant human data group” (Guba, 1981, p. 80).

Through these interactions, I began building a clearer picture of the learning and living situation of the Chinese international student participants. Yet something was missing from my inquiry. I still related to the Chinese student participants as if they all shared the same identity.

### **Beginning the Journey**

As I discuss in chapter one, it is being considered why so many researchers contend that active learners learn best (Huang & Cowden, 2009; Tran, 2013). For the purposes of language acquisition, active participation in class is often coupled with motivation (e.g., Ushioda, 2008) and identified as a trait that describes what good language learners do (e.g., Rubin, 1975). Likewise, many sources discuss the reticence of Chinese international students in seminars (e.g., Zhao & Stork, 2010) and view reserve and restraint as signs that something is wrong with one’s educational background or upbringing. An overwhelming tendency to identify a so-called Chinese politeness as being problematic in communication (Liang, 2009) also exists, along with the habit of viewing Chinese learners as unable to participate in open classroom discussions (Zhao & Stork, 2010).

In this section, I outline how my perceptions regarding the classroom participation of Chinese international students changed as a result of interview interactions and longitudinal exposure. I begin by highlighting my initial points of departure regarding classroom participation and illustrate how my preoccupation with this issue affected my initial observations. I counter the assumption that Chinese

students are unable to speak and advocate for an understanding of classroom events that does not rely on surface descriptions alone. I conclude this section with an alternative reading of an event I observed in December of 2015, and iterate the necessity of viewing classroom interactions as situation-specific (Cheng, 2000) and dynamic rather than static and unchanging.

### **Counting in the Classroom**

*A late morning in mid-December 2015. I am in a class in which nearly half of the students are Chinese. The tables of the class are arranged as a half circle, with two sets of two tables in the center of the room.*

Inspired by the graduate course I've been taking, I have decided to explore the issue of Chinese students' in-class participation by counting the number of times students volunteer answers to their instructor's elicitations. Over the next 90 minutes, students will voluntarily offer answers 102 times. Cumulatively, only 16 of the voluntary answers come from the Chinese students<sup>10</sup>.

When I look over my observations notes at home, I realize that 11 of the 16 responses from the Chinese student participants were given by the same male student. I look closer and realize that four of the Chinese students had said nothing at all during the lesson. I write about the observation in my journal:

“A lot of the Chinese students in this class are mute and class carries on without their input, as if they are not even there. I feel like I am watching them slide off a cliff. It is as if they exist in another dimension. Where are they? I am participating in courses in another cohort as well and will see if it is the same with them. As the class is comprised mainly of Chinese students, it will be an interesting comparison.” (Bryant, 2014-2016)

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<sup>10</sup> Although this is the most extreme example I observed, I include it in my narrative because it had the largest impact on my thinking.



As this demonstrates, my reading of this event was colored by a perception that viewed Chinese learners are passive and unable to speak, an interpretation that affected interview interactions with student participants from this group.

#### *Preoccupied with Passivity*

As I discussed previously, my initial focus was shaped by the notion that all Chinese international students are academically (e.g., Zhao & Stork, 2010) unprepared to participate in classroom discussions. I often compared the Chinese and non-Chinese participants regarding how often they voluntarily responded. My classroom observation notes likewise document a lingering preoccupation with this theme; all of my notes for the first five weeks concern themselves in one way or another with comparing Chinese students to their peers regarding the number of times they voluntarily responded to elicitations. Although it was not a specific question in either the pilot interviews or the revised version, I question 23 of the 27 participants about why they were either not active or passive in class in initial interviews. The following two interview excerpts illustrate these interactions.

#### *Interview with Two H2 Participants*

*A late Sunday morning in early January 2016. Interview with two Chinese student participants in H2. We are seated at two tables put together in a reserved room at a local café frequented by students, and have ordered coffee and dessert.*

I have noticed that the Chinese participants in H2 do not express their opinions as readily and openly as their non-Chinese peers do, and hope to find out why. I abide by my earlier decision to investigate the reasons for what I had interpreted as passivity. The following exchange begins 39 minutes into the interview:

Joanna: Wir haben...ANGST davor. Wir können NICHTS gegen die Lehrer.  
Was die Lehrer sagen, obwohl es falsch ist, können wir nichts...

Lisa: ...das wäre nicht höflich.

Me: Dann bleibt man...

Joanna: ...ruhig, also...

Me: ...obwohl man eine ganz andere Meinung hat?

Lisa: Genau.

Joanna: Kannst DU es verstehen? Wenn die Studenten oder Schüler etwas  
gegen die Lehrer sagen, werden sie, zum Beispiel, wenn DIESE  
Studenten haben immer eine andere Meinung, werden sie eine ...

Lisa: Aber ich glaube, hier geht es um die Meinung, also, aber  
normalerweise ist es so, wir müssen Respekt oder HÖFLICH sein,  
wenn wir sprechen mit ... Menschen, die älter als wir sind.

Joanna: Und es geht auch darum, dass wenn wir Studenten...

Lisa: ...das ist wichtig. Und deshalb sagen wir GAR nichts. Aber in  
MEINER Schule war es nicht so. Ich glaube, das kann ÜBERALL  
passieren.

(Lisa and Joanna, personal communication. 2016, January 8;  
pseudonyms chosen to protect participant confidentiality)

*Translation:*

Joanna: We are...AFRAID. We can't say ANYTHING back to the teacher.  
What the teachers say, even though it's wrong, we can't say  
anything...

Lisa: ...that wouldn't be polite.

Me: So you stay...

Joanna: ...quiet...

Me: ...even though you have another opinion?

Lisa: Exactly.

Joanna: Can YOU understand it? If the students or pupils say something back  
to the teacher, they will, for example, if THESE students always have  
a different opinion, they will get a bad ...

Lisa: But I think it has to do with the opinion, but usually, we have to have RESPECT or at least be polite when we talk to those who are older than us.

Joanna: And it's also because, if we as students...

Lisa: ...that is important. And that's why we say ABSOLUTELY nothing back. But it wasn't like that in MY school. I think, this can happen ANYWHERE.

(Lisa and Joanna, personal communication. 2016, January 8; pseudonyms chosen to protect participant confidentiality)

Our conversation is in response to a question I had asked to clarify what Joanna had just mentioned about the differences between Germany and China. I had also asked why the Chinese students did not voluntarily offer an answer to an instructor's discussion question in a lecture I had observed. As Lisa later suggested, it's possible that students in every country remain silent when they disagree with something said by the instructor, a situation she perceives as not being specific to Chinese students. The next interview excerpt sheds more light on the importance of viewing classroom interactions as situation-specific.

#### *Interview with One E2 Participant*

*An early morning in mid-December 2015. Interview with one Chinese participant from E2. We are seated at two tables in a reserved room in a café around the corner from the college preparatory institute, and have ordered coffee.*

In this initial pilot interview, I mention that I have never heard him speak during class. This exchange begins 12 minutes and 34 seconds into an hour-long interview:

Bill: Ja, aber in anderen Kursen spreche ich. Zum Beispiel, in Mathematik.

Me: Uh huh...

Bill: Dann spreche ich SEHR gerne.

Me: Ja?

Bill: Aber Wirtschaft ... was ist das?

Me: Mathematik?

Bill: Mathematik ist einfach.

Me: Uh huh...

Bill: Ja, Wirtschaft ist ... wie Literatur. Ich weiss nicht, es gibt VIELE, viele Wörter. Einige Wörter kenne ich nicht ... dann... mit dem Handy gucke ich mal und dann ... die Zeit ... passt. Das ist ... das ist das Problem.

Me: Und das...

Bill: Aber...in Mathematik...uhhh...kann ich mitdenken, und vielleicht denke ich schneller als die LEHRERIN, und dann spreche ich.

(Bill, personal communication. 2015, December 11;  
pseudonym chosen to protect participant confidentiality)

*Translation:*

Bill: Yeah, but in other classes I talk. For example, in Mathematics.

Me: Uh huh...

Bill: During that class I REALLY like talking.

Me: Yeah?

Bill: But Economics...what is that?

Me: Mathematics?

Bill: Mathematics is easy.

Me: Uh huh...

Bill: Yeah, Economics is ... like Literature. I don't know, there are MANY, many words. Some words I don't know ... so ... I look them up on my cell phone and then...the time...has passed. That is ... that is the problem.

Me: and that...

Bill: But...in Math...uhh...I can think along, and maybe I even think faster than the TEACHER, and then I speak.

(Bill, personal communication. 2015, December 11;  
pseudonym chosen to protect participant confidentiality)

In this excerpt, Bill informs me that he speaks more in other classes, and can even offer answers to questions before the instructor knows them. Although he may not volunteer answers in Economic History, he is talkative in Math. This confirms Cheng's (2000) argument that the classroom behaviors of students often differ from one situation to the next.

### *Rereading of Classroom Observation*

After two semesters of contact with the four cohorts, I have accumulated valuable background information that gives life to the situation I observed in mid-December of 2015. I realize that, while active participation in class gives an initial impression of learners who are motivated, it does not necessarily demonstrate the mastery of learning material required to advance. I am also aware that each class session is unique. The two participants who offered the most voluntary responses in H1, for example, did not pass their first semester's coursework and were required to repeat the following semester. Similarly, the participant in E1 who volunteered the most answers had failed the previous semester's work and was repeating the same coursework for a second semester.

Reflecting on ten years of teaching experience in China, Cheng notes, "Asian students (at least Chinese students) are not culturally predisposed to be reticent and passive" (2000, p. 438). Therefore, interpreting Asian students as reticent obscures a clearer view of classroom dynamics. Much like Cheng (2000), I realized that my own experiences of teaching in Beijing and Shijiazhuang counters popular descriptions that frame all Chinese students as reticent and passive learners. Although it is true that many Asian students are quieter than their Western peers (Li, 2012), it does not follow that

they are unable to speak. Much like contentions that interpret the silence that can be observed in one context as a sign that something is wrong with Chinese student-instructor interactions, such conclusions miss out on a deeper understanding.

Instead of thinking in terms of active participation in class – a surface understanding that relies on visible and audible behavior – thinking in terms of learner engagement is a much more worthwhile endeavor. In early January 2016, a female participant from H1’s response to my question about why she was not active in class gave me a new way of thinking about this issue: “Ich bin aktiv. Ich lese und lerne die Texte, wenn ich wieder zu Hause bin und mache die Hausaufgaben” [“I am active. I read and study the texts when I am home and do the homework” (Anonymous Participant, personal communication, January 10, 2016). In much the same way, Bill demonstrates the qualities of an engaged learner. Although he does not often speak in History or Economics, he looks up words and remains mentally present in class. I now interpret the classroom observation differently:

“Although a lot of the Chinese students in Humanities 1 did not speak during the class session I observed in mid-December, many of them have progressed to the next level. One exception is their compatriot, who always actively participated and volunteered answers during the first semester. He failed and had to repeat, but has let me know that he does not mind it one bit.” (Bryant, 2014-2016)

As my reflections demonstrate, a deeper understanding of the Chinese student participants added a new dimension to interpretations. My starting point was to observe the outward behavior of the participants, and I later learned to look at the situation from a longitudinal perspective. A similar shift in perspective likewise transformed how I regard the socialization patterns of the Chinese international student participants.

## **Taking a Day Trip**

Another preoccupation I had from the beginning is the issue of how Chinese international students socialize while completing a year or degree overseas. As my proposal indicated, it was the impetus for embarking on the project and a theme that remained with me throughout the two semesters. My goal was to more deeply understand why so many students from China stay with their compatriots while learning overseas. In the proposal, I even went so far as to list the financial status of students and an unfamiliarity with study abroad as possible reasons.

An excursion I took part in halfway through the second semester brings this issue to light more clearly. It was not only what occurred during a day-long school trip to another city, but my interpretation of it, that contributed to my understanding of how the Chinese international student participants in this study socialize while in Germany. My initial interpretation of the event is drastically different from my current perspective.

In keeping with tradition, all the student groups go on a school excursion shortly following an exam week in the second semester. The trip is usually seen as a welcome relief, as it typically occurs after the students have received their exam grades and before everyone gets an extended weekend.

### *School Excursion*

*Halfway through the second semester, 2016. I am with a student group. We are traveling by train on a day trip to visit another city, and have just boarded.*

I was deeply disappointed with what happened during the trip to another city. I noticed that the students, all of whom came from China, divided themselves up immediately into three groups as soon as we got on the train. One group of four students

had brought a pack of cards and played Uno during the entire trip. Another group of students remained largely to themselves, although they shared a compartment with another group.

When we arrived, we made our way to the museum. Some of the students did not mingle with the group and lagged behind, smoking one cigarette after another. Once we reached the museum, all of the participants requested the audio guide in Chinese, despite having an advanced level of German. I later learned that the entire group went to a restaurant after the tour and then returned immediately back home because they had perceived the entire day as boring.

What disappointed me most during the trip was that the students did not make new acquaintances and had not used the chance to practice their German. Instead, they spoke Chinese for the entire day amongst themselves and even stayed together as one large group after we had toured the museum. When I later asked why they had returned so early, they listed the rain and the fact they had already seen the city as reasons for their discontent. When I returned to the dorm, I wrote:

“The student group severely disappointed me today. We went to another city and they did not speak a word of German. They also did not enjoy the tour of the museum. After our time in the museum was over, they all went off together to a restaurant and told me they were going to come back to the dormitories as soon as they finished eating. It seems that this group does not mingle with others, even when given the chance.” (Bryant, 2014-2016)

I wanted to find out why they had stayed together for the whole day, and brought up the trip later in the interviews to discover the reason. In half of the interviews, participants mentioned they had been experiencing similar problems for the entire year. In the words of one participant, “Ich bin nach Deutschland gekommen aber bin in China geblieben” [“I have come to Germany but have remained in China”] (Sara, personal



communication, May 2016). Other participants mentioned that it had been raining heavily throughout the morning and that, for this reason, the excursion was not enjoyable. I also discovered that the non-Chinese students from the class had decided to go on excursions with other groups.

### *Background Reading*

Cheng (2000) argues that interactions in a group of learners is situation specific, an argument I perceive as extending to school-related excursions. Indeed, the students who went along on the trip were all from China. They took classes with and mingled largely amongst themselves both during and outside class.

It often remains difficult for many students from China to integrate within a foreign academic host environment. Many universities in the United States, for example, continually recruit large numbers of students from China as a way to receive tuition dollars (Belkin & Jordan, 2016). While the recruitment of students from China potentially internationalizes college campuses, an overwhelming trend is to group all the students from China together, thus keeping them academically and physically separate for the duration of their stay abroad (Belkin & Jordan, 2016). The chances that a student will expand social networks under such circumstances are minimal.

### *Background Information*

After questioning four participants about the trip, I now have a deeper understanding of what happened. Two of the participants mentioned that this type of situation is one they often encounter on a daily basis. They live and study with fellow compatriots. While they may wish to socialize with others outside their group, doing so under these circumstances remains difficult.

In addition to these circumstances, an intense class and exam schedule plays a role. Each semester is broken up into either two or three exam weeks, the results of which determine eligibility for university study. Such time constraints make it increasingly difficult to socialize; it is not until the third semester that they have free time for extracurricular activities. As I discuss in chapter four, it is during this transitional semester that many of the participants I interviewed report having time to seek outside employment, travel, and socialize with groups not in their cohort.

#### *Self-reflecting on the Trip*

When I self-reflect on the school trip, I recall more background information that changes how I think of the excursion. I remember how warmly three of the participants had greeted me before we boarded the train, and how I had then quietly separated myself from the group. I remember that two other student participants had invited me to join them for lunch, an invitation I had declined because I wanted to stay longer in the museum. It also comes to my mind that because I did not have an umbrella, one of the participants offered me theirs, an offer that I also declined. When I think of myself as others may have seen me, I realize they may view someone who chose to stay alone and not communicate in German, despite being in Germany. Would I also be characterized as a passive language learner? This valuable information adds a new dimension to my description and interpretation of the school excursion<sup>11</sup>.

#### *Rereading the Trip*

Just as with the classroom observations, gaining more background information regarding the interactions that took place during the trip to another city allows me to

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<sup>11</sup> Apart from my initial error in approaching the participants as a collective block, my non-engagement on the trip is my biggest regret. I am quite certain that if I had interacted more, and accepted the invitation to lunch, I would have a different story to tell regarding the school excursion.

interpret the situation differently. I now know that several of the students in this group continually seek out the chance to interact in German on the weekend. I recall how many of the student participants reached out to me during the excursion, and that I did not accept their offers and invitation to join them for lunch. I also view myself differently; instead of thinking of myself as a separate entity, I realize that I, too, contributed to what happened on the train, on the way to the museum, and after the tour. This information changes how I now perceive and describe the trip:

“The student group had bad luck on the excursion. It rained the entire morning and what they thought was going to be a visit to a castle turned out to be just another walk through another museum. If they had known this, they would have opted to visit another place on their school trip. The tour was not guided and was rather a walk through several rooms with the help of an audio guide. After they had their lunch, several of the students were still drenched with rain and everyone was so tired they just went straight back home.” (Bryant, 2014-2016)

The contrasts between the first and second interpretation of the school excursion are drastic. While my first reading offers a surface-level interpretation that relies heavily on stereotypes, the second one presents more detailed information that makes both situation and event come to life. How I understand the excursion changes as a result of a deepening perspective.

### **Returning Home**

Just as my perspectives regarding classroom sessions and school excursions changed through time, so did my reading and understanding of social events. This section describes an event on a tram on a Friday evening, and how my initial interpretations of what happened were flattened by a preconceived notion that Chinese international students face difficulties in socializing with others. I follow the description

of this event with an interpretation before giving more background information and an alternative reading.

*Midnight on the Tram*

*After midnight on a Friday evening, May, 2016. I have been invited to have hotpot, and we have spent the remainder of the evening watching the first episode of the Chinese TV series Running Man. We are on the tram and are headed back to the train station, where we will transfer to another line to reach the dormitories. A group of approximately six middle-aged German adults gets on the tram at the next stop. They have been out drinking; five of them are carrying beer bottles.*

Two of the three Chinese students I was with had been sitting in the row of seats next to the door, and another Chinese student and I were standing by the entrance and chatting about how Angela Baby had outsmarted the other characters in the episode we had just watched. The group enters, having a loud conversation about where they should exit.

Within the next minute, the entire atmosphere in the streetcar changes. The conversation we had been having stops; the Chinese student and I immediately make way for the couples, who huddle together in front of the door, separating us from the other two in the group. While the three couples continue to debate where they should exit the tram, the other two participants get up and quickly make their way to the front of the tram, thus separating us from them even more.

When we reach the train station, everyone gets out – the six German adults, the three Chinese student participants, and I. The six Germans continue discussing how to reach their next destination, while the three Chinese student participants scurry across the tracks to transfer lines. I walk slowly along from behind, and notice the three

Chinese student participants watching out the window of the streetcar. When they see me, they shout, “她来了! [Ta lai le!]”

For the next twenty minutes, no one says a word. When the tram reaches the first set of dorms, Gina pats me on the shoulder and says, “Take care of yourself!” before she and Louise exit. As the tram nears the dormitory, I try to continue the conversation Allie and I had been having about the TV show, but get no response.

When I get back to the dormitory, I write:

“The German party scene is very confusing for the Chinese students. Tonight, I saw how scary it can be for students who aren’t used to seeing a crowd of drunk people in a public place. When a crowd of Germans who had been drinking got on the tram, Gina and Louise got very afraid very quickly. The conversation I had been having with Allie about the TV show stopped, and after the incident, the happy mood was gone. Now I understand why Chinese students might not want to go out and socialize with Germans, since that atmosphere can be such a shock”. (Bryant, 2014-2016)

As my reflections and interpretations of the event show, I had perceived the situation as frightening for the Chinese student participants, and wanted to assume that this is why they might not want to socialize with Germans while in Germany. I had interpreted their moving to another section of the tram as proof that they had felt frightened. My interpretations and thoughts about the event show that I was still focused on finding out why Chinese students do not mingle with others while abroad.

#### *Interview with One HI Participant*

*It is 2 PM on May 31, 2016. Interview with Louise. We are seated at two long tables in a reserved study room, and have been discussing what her plans are for the future. I ask what she made of the earlier event in the tram, and wanted to know if she felt afraid as I had interpreted it. This exchange begins 16 minutes and 29 seconds into our third and last interview:*

Louise: Ja, die Betrunkenen hatten viel Bier. Und einer davon hat das Bier auf Gina und ihre Freundin verspritzt.

Me: Das habe ich nicht gewusst.

Louise: Ja, und alles war verschmutzt. Ich kann nicht verstehen, warum diese Betrunkenen...vielleicht aufgrund der Betrunkenheit sagten diese Menschen nichts. Das kann ich nicht verstehen. Gina war wütend und dann gingen wir auf die andere Seite des Wagens.

Me: Das habe ich nicht gesehen.

Louise: Und eine Frau von der Gruppe schauten<sup>12</sup> uns unfreundlich an. Und Gina war noch wütender.

Me: Und du?

Louise: Ich war nicht wütend, aber ich fand es nicht so gut, dass sie sich nicht entschuldigt hatten. Ich glaube, zuerst muss man sich entschuldigen.

Me: Aber das haben sie nicht gemacht.

Louise: Ja.

Me: Und danach sind wir umgestiegen. Wie hast du die zweite Strassenbahn gefunden?

Louise: Gina hat gesagt, es ist schon vorbei und jetzt müssen wir die Kleidung waschen. Später habe ich mit jemandem darüber gesprochen und er hat gesagt, das passiert manchmal und man muss vorsichtig sein.

(Louise, personal communication. 2016, May 31; pseudonym chosen to protect participant confidentiality)

*Translation:*

Louise: Yes, the drunk people had a lot of beer. And one of them sprayed the beer on Gina and her friend.

Me: I didn't know that.

Louise: Yes, and everything was soiled. I cannot understand why these drunk people ... perhaps because of their drunkenness these people didn't say anything. I do not understand. Gina was very angry and then we went to the other side of the tram.

Me: I didn't see that.

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<sup>12</sup> This has been transcribed as said.

Louise: And one of the women in the group glared at us. And then Gina was even angrier.

Me: And you?

Louise: I wasn't angry, but I didn't think it was very nice that they didn't apologize. I think that the first thing you do in a situation like that is apologize.

Me: But they didn't.

Louise: Yeah.

Me: And then we transferred. What did you think of the second tram?

Louise: Gina said, it's over now and we have to wash my clothes. Later I talked to someone about what happened and he said that that kind of thing sometimes happens and you just have to be careful.

(Louise, personal communication. 2016, May 31;  
pseudonym chosen to protect participant confidentiality)

As this conversation shows, it wasn't fear that had caused them to move to the front of the streetcar as I had initially interpreted it. Because of Gina's anger, they had moved. The information about what had happened pushed me to more accurately interpret the event.

#### *Rereading the Tram Event*

*After midnight on a Friday evening, May, 2016. Gina, Louise, and Allie have invited me to have hotpot at a classmate's apartment, and we have spent the remainder of the evening watching the first episode of the Chinese TV series Running Man. We are on the tram and are headed back to the train station, where we will transfer to another line to reach the dormitories. A group of approximately six middle-aged German adults gets on the tram at the next stop. They have been out drinking; five of them are carrying beer bottles.*

Gina and Louise had been sitting in the row of seats next to the door, and Allie and I were standing by the entrance and chatting about how Angela Baby had outsmarted the other characters in the episode we had just watched. The group enters, having a loud conversation about where they should exit.

Within the next minute, the entire atmosphere in the streetcar changes. The conversation we had been having stops. Allie and I immediately make way for the couples, who huddle together in front of the door, separating us from Gina and Louise. While the three couples continue to debate where they should exit the tram, Gina and Louise get up and quickly make their way to the front of the tram, thus separating us from them even more.

When we reach the train station, everyone gets out – the three couples, Gina, Louise, Allie, and I. The party of six continues discussing how to achieve their next destination, while Gina, Louise, and Allie run across the tracks. I walk slowly along from behind, and notice that Allie, Louise, and Gina are looking out the window. When I get on, they turn around. When they see me, Gina and Allie shout, “*Ta lai le* [She’s here]!”

For the next twenty minutes, no one says a word. Gina keeps looking down at her shirt and backpack, which have been sprayed with beer by one of the men from the group. And he didn’t even apologize! It is a new shirt and now it is possibly ruined. She is anxious to get home so she can wash it. Louise is tired and doesn’t really want to spend the rest of the night helping Gina clean her clothes, but knows that’s probably what she will end up doing.



When the tram reaches the first set of dorms, Gina pats me on the shoulder and says, “Take care of yourself!” before she and Louise exit. As the tram nears the dormitory, I try to continue the conversation Allie and I had been having about the TV show, but get no response. She has seen the same episode several times now, and is bored with everyone’s fascination with it. Angela Baby isn’t even her favorite character. After learning these details, I can now write:

“The group of drunk people on the tram totally ruined it for Louise and Gina. When one of the men sprayed his beer all over Gina’s backpack and new shirt, he didn’t even apologize for it. His girlfriend just stared at Louise and Gina and didn’t say a word. Because of this treatment, Gina became very angry, and she and Louise moved very quickly to the front of the tram before she lost her temper. I don’t know why I kept trying to talk to Allie about Angela Baby. I know it’s her least favorite character.” (Bryant, 2014-2016)

What characterizes my description and interpretation of the event more than anything is that I started relating to the participants as individuals with their own names and personalities. Instead of thinking in terms of ‘Chinese student participant’, I regard each of them as separate, rather than a collective entity.

### **Ending the Journey**

*A day in June 2016. The sidewalk just outside the dorm. I see Allie.*

When she sees me from afar, she smiles brightly and calls me by name. I know her name now, too. It appears as if she has been out getting groceries. We have a brief exchange about the exams she has just taken. Before she continues on the way to her dorm, we wish each other luck. When I get back to my room, I realize it’s the first exchange we’ve had during which I knew her name. I think to myself:

“I have finally started regarding Chinese students as individuals. Today I saw Allie, Bill, and Louise, and I knew their names. I only started thinking this way a couple months ago, and the difference is amazing. I am a different and better person when I relate to the participants as individuals. I hope that in the future,

I'll continue to be able to look at the students as people (*you*), rather just one entity (*it*).” (Bryant, 2014-2016)

Out of all the transformations that occurred in me this year, the greatest one was the ability to begin regarding the Chinese student participants in this study as individuals.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed how my own interpretations of classroom sessions, school excursions, and social events changed as a result of longitudinal exposure, communication, and self-reflection. I have examined my actions as a participant observer and concluded that my experiences from December 15, 2015 to July 1, 2016 contributed to these changes. When I juxtapose initial and present conceptions, I realize that an emerging ability to regard the participants as individuals brought about the most transformative shift in my interpretations, actions, and behaviors. In the following chapter, I discuss the identity and motivation of several Chinese student participants who took part in this study. I will illustrate that, as individuals, they have their own intricate formations of identities that change throughout their time abroad. I also counter the notion that because Chinese students come from a seemingly collectivistic society they all have the same motivations and desires. Like their identities, their motivations for completing a degree program overseas are multiple and range along several continuums.

## **Chapter 4: Identities, Motivations, and the Travelling Selves**

As I illustrated in the last chapter, I initially viewed classroom observations, school excursions, and social events through a single lens that perceived the participants as one collective entity. When I began relating to participants as unique individuals, rather than a uniform category, I was able to access multiple viewpoints of what I had observed. In this chapter, I show how they have a series of changing identities that cannot be relegated to a static understanding. I portray four student participants and discuss a few of the possible combinations between identities and motivations.

### **Identities**

This study goes against a firm tradition that homogenizes the identity and social behaviors of Chinese students. I argue that “identity work involves continual positioning and repositioning of the self and others during any given social interaction and/or across different interactions with the same or other people” (Noels, 2013, p. 290). I understand identity to be both dynamic and influential and agree with Dörnyei’s (2005) distinction between the self and language learning motivation. What emerges is an understanding that “identities and motivation share multiple and bidirectional relationships” and that, like motivations, “identities grow and change” (Brophy, 2009, p. 155). One’s possible selves both coordinate and determine “the relevance of various incentives for future behavior” (Macintyre, Mackinnon, & Clement, 2009, p. 194). Like Eccles (2009), I acknowledge the possibility that each individual has a combination of personal and collective identities and perceive identities and motivations as working together and adapting to fit situation and context.

## Motivations

While the intimate connection between identity and motivation has long been established (Kaplan & Flum, 2009), there remains very “little agreement . . . in the literature with regard to the exact meaning” (Dörnyei, 1994, p. 117) of either. At the same time, relating to an entire group of individuals as if they all share the same identity detracts from an ability to explore the role of identity on motivation for acquiring a language. As shown by Gardner and Lambert (1959), motivation greatly impacts the final outcome of the language learning experience. They demonstrate that learners who experience integrative motivation, or positive affiliations with the target language speaking community or culture, can generally enjoy the same degree of success as those learners with an aptitude for learning a language.

Their discovery regarding the importance of integrative motivation sparked much interest among FL practitioners and researchers regarding the power of motivation. In particular, Gardner and Lambert’s (1959) work raised awareness that “affective variables . . . have been shown to be at least as important as language aptitude for predicting L2 achievement” (Noels et al., 2000, p. 58). Their integrative-instrumental construct (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) also later provided much-needed insight concerning the relationship between motivation and the ultimate attainment (Birdsong, 1992) of foreign language learners.

What remains missing, however, is a deeper exploration regarding the types of motivation present among foreign and second language learners while completing a study abroad program or degree overseas. Although of paramount importance, their integrative-instrumental construct mainly highlights the differences between integrative

and instrumental motivation. Their conceptualization emerged mainly from questionnaires that were distributed in foreign language learning environments, and hence does not consider the larger context of study abroad. The binary understanding between integrative and instrumental motivation likewise tends to place learners into either integrative or instrumental categories instead of along a spectrum through which learners, and their identities, travel continually.

I agree with Noels et al. (2000) that a consideration of additional motivational theories proves necessary for a more flexible orientation towards the continual passage from one end of the spectrum to the next<sup>13</sup>. Central to this pursuit is the need for a non-binary construct of motivation that conceptualizes the motivations of language learners as journeying more dynamically along not one spectrum, but across multiple dimensions and spectrums, as they find themselves in various situations within society and the community. Employing multiple approaches more accurately reflects the reality that language users' encounters with motivation originate from a myriad of sources and dimensions (Noels et al., 2000) and that this gives rise to a pluralistic experience or experiences of motivation.

As a result, my understanding of motivation overlays Gardner and Lambert's (1959; 1972) contributions with a foundation that acknowledges the possibility of additional experience or experiences. Understanding motivation as either instrumental or integrative contributes to the tendency to approach integrative motivation as intrinsic

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<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of my study, I have chosen to combine two motivational theories to demonstrate how individuals possess the ability to move dynamically across several categories of motivation, and should therefore not be limited to one spectrum or theory.

and instrumental motivation as extrinsic<sup>14</sup>. It does indeed appear in the beginning that intrinsic motivation most closely resembles integrative motivation (i.e., acquiring a language because of positive affiliations with a speaking community), while extrinsic motivation parallels instrumental motivation (i.e., the desire to learn a language to improve career prospects in the future). But reality is not so simple. It remains possible for instrumental motivation to be mainly intrinsic in nature, and for one to pass from one end of the dichotomy to the next (see Carreira, 2005).

Indeed, just as the opposite of love is not hate, the opposite of intrinsic motivation is not extrinsic motivation. Like all affective factors, motivation cannot be limited to the confines of a binary construct. In the same way that indifference “elicits no response” (Wiesel, 1999, para. 10), amotivation, that is, “the state of lacking an intention to act” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 61), opposes intrinsic motivation, or “doing something because it is inherently enjoyable or interesting” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 55). I perceive Deci and Ryan’s (2000, p. 61) taxonomy of human motivation, which distinguishes between amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation<sup>15</sup>, as essential for more deeply understanding the roles that various categories of motivation play in guiding social behaviors and choices.

Consequent to the above considerations, I understand motivation to be comprised of two constructs, rather than one (Figure 1). I contend that it is possible for an individual to move from one type of motivation to another in their passages, for

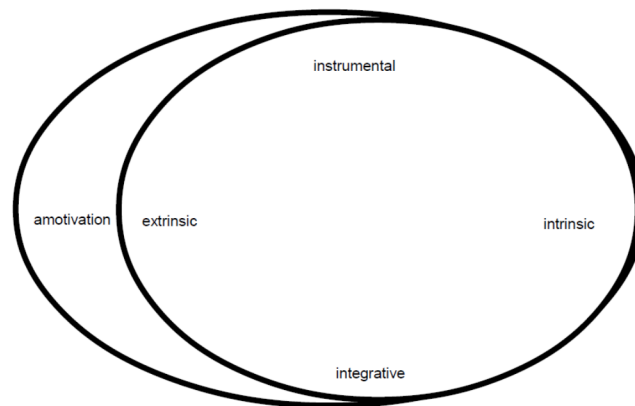
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<sup>14</sup> The framework created by Gardner and Lambert (1959) allows for integrative and instrumental motivation to be both extrinsic and intrinsic, but its general impression is one of dichotomy, rather than movement.

<sup>15</sup> Deci and Ryan discuss several different categories of extrinsic motivation that do not appear in my visualization. These include “external regulation, introjection, identification, and integration” (2000, p. 61). External regulation and introjection are initiated by external sources, while identification and integration are influenced by internal sources.

example, to experience both integrative motivation and amotivation during the course of study abroad or learning an additional language. While it may initially appear that Deci and Ryan's (2000) triangular approach simply adds amotivation to an earlier understanding of motivation, considering the possibility that the self might have initially experienced no autonomy when embarking on a study abroad program remains essential.

**Figure 1. Visual Representation of Motivational Types Considered<sup>16</sup>**



### **The Gallery**

To more fully illustrate how Chinese international students exhibit a full range of motivation and identity, this section displays a collection of four student participants and offers a glimpse into the continuums they experience over the course of one academic year overseas. I have chosen to depict four learners – one from each cohort I shadowed while completing this project – to show how identities and motivations can

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<sup>16</sup> Although it may at first blush appear counterintuitive, I have intentionally placed instrumental motivation at the top of the sphere to further conceptualize movement along these two continuums. I abide by my earlier contention that motivation can only be categorized (not measured) from one moment to the next, and that experiences of this affective factor constantly fluctuate.

evolve. As stated in chapter two, I focus on the changes that occur in individuals over a longer period of time and therefore have made use of longitudinal panel interviews (Lewis, 2003, p. 54). Background information obtained through participant observation in social events and school excursions adds depth and life to the portraits. Although these portraits illustrate just a few of the various combinations of motivations and identities present, they show part of the broader picture that became visible only when I related to the participants on an individual level. I iterate that the identities and motivations they relayed and have experienced developed, have expanded, and will continue to evolve over time, and that they cannot be understood to represent what all Chinese international students experience while studying in Germany.

*E1: Sara*

I begin this mini portrait of learners by describing Sara, a student from the E1 group. I became acquainted with Sara during two interviews – one in late 2015 and another one in May of 2016 – in addition to interacting with her during optional school excursions and social events. Sara’s linguistic and personal background is unique –she did not complete a German course in Germany and gained the necessary linguistic requirements for admission to the college preparatory institute during high school. In order to obtain the language proficiency required, she completed an evening course for three years as a high school student in China, which took place from 6 to 8 PM three days a week. She recalls that in the beginning, there were 50 people in her cohort but at the end, only 15 students remained. She reasons the stress associated with *gaokao*, the admissions test for university in China, as the reason that the majority of students quit the German program. Her decision to study German and come to Germany was made of

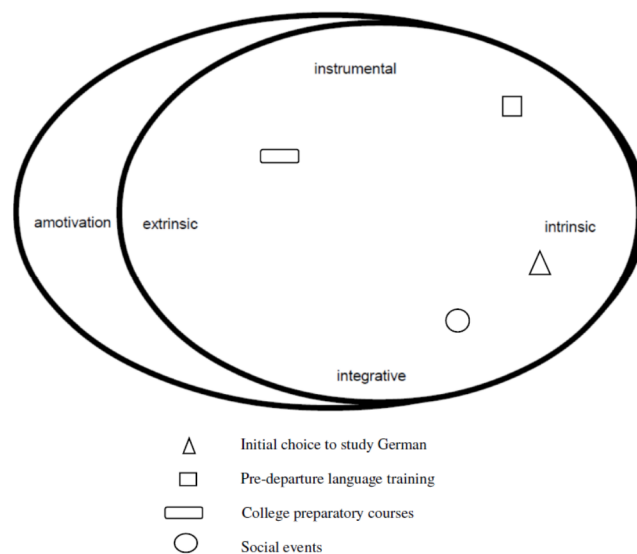


her own will, a decision that her parents supported.

She mentioned in both interviews her desire to get to know others in Germany, and reported feeling bored in her first semester due to an unfamiliarity with the city and not knowing others outside the school environment. In the first interview in early 2016, she perceived diligence as what makes a student successful, and emphasized that one has to have this in order to succeed. In the second interview in May of 2016, she mentioned that in order to succeed one has to stay what she termed “chill”, something she defines as not getting distracted by others or by outside events in life.

Her dream is to study economics at Humboldt University, although she has a growing interest in art. Sara was one of the more dynamic learners I came across while completing this project. She accepted all invitations to social events, taking part in optional *Stammtisch* activities and outings to parks that were organized by one of the instructors. What changed during the year was a growing confidence with German and in adapting to social life at university.

**Figure 2. Visual Representation of Sara’s Motivational Experiences**



### *E2: Bill*

I continue this gallery of learners by presenting Bill, a student who was originally studying in the E2 cohort. I had two interviews with Bill – one in mid-December 2015 and the second one in April of 2016. Out of all the students I interviewed and came into contact with from the E2 group, I have chosen to describe him due to changes regarding the way he self-identifies and his linguistic background.

In the first interview with Bill, I asked him why I had never heard him speak during instruction. He let me know right away that his silence did not extend to his behavior in all the subjects, and mentioned that in Math he spoke often and was so confident of the learning material that he could provide answers before the instructor knew them. Contrasting his classroom behaviors between Math and Economic History, he paralleled the latter with Literature and mentioned that German texts were written indirectly, while in Chinese the wording is direct.

My second interview with Bill was the only one that I conducted in English. He insisted that we use English for the second interview because he was preparing for an English-language proficiency exam and needed the practice. In the second interview, I learned that Bill comes from an area in China where neither Mandarin nor Cantonese was traditionally spoken<sup>17</sup>. He revealed that his parents only completed five to six years of education in China and never even made it to high school, and that they are not able to speak Mandarin<sup>18</sup>. He sees this background as both a strength and a weakness, and disclosed that his experiences in learning Mandarin did not begin until he began official

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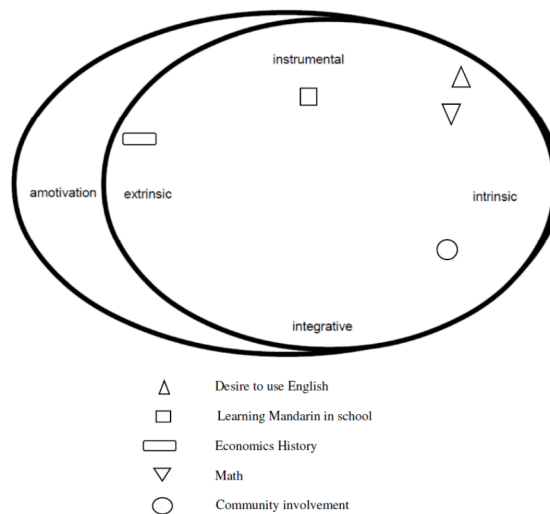
<sup>17</sup> Unbeknownst to many, 30% of the Chinese population speaks Mandarin as a second, rather than as a first, language (“China”, Lewis, Simon, & Fennig, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Participant’s hometown not disclosed to protect confidentiality.

schooling; therefore, he continually has problems with using the language. However, having this linguistic background is also an advantage, as he is able to have conversations with his parents in their native language without others being able to understand.

He mentioned in our second interview that he has no problems with the widespread use of Mandarin in China, and that he perceives the culture of his hometown as dying out. He wants to become a successful businessman and the CEO of a company one day. Bill’s social life expanded during the two semesters in Germany. He is now active in the community and volunteers during the weekend as a caretaker for children of parents who come from China. Like all the student participants I interviewed during the transitional semester, he now has a part-time job in the area.

**Figure 3. Visual Representation of Bill’s Motivational Experiences**



*H1: Louise*

Louise took part in three interviews: one in late January 2015, one in early May 2016, and a third one in June 2016. She began learning German while a high school student in China, during which she completed an introductory German course in her

hometown. In addition, she studied German for a second semester at another institute several hours away from where she lived, for which she had to commute on a weekly basis. When I interviewed her in January 2016, she had been in Germany for nearly two years, and had completed several more courses in German as a foreign language at a local language institute in Germany before commencing her studies at the college preparatory institute. In the first two interviews, Louise described herself as *zurückhaltend* (reserved) and *schüchtern* (shy), and chose to interview with others. She later told me it wasn't until June 2016 that she felt comfortable interviewing with me individually.

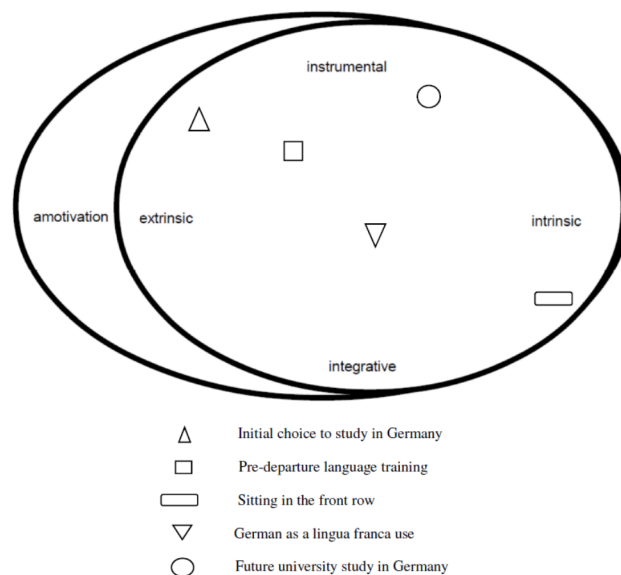
Just as with Bill and Sara, one notices how the way she self-identifies as a user of German changes through time, and that this identity directly impacts both daily routine and reasons for studying in Germany. In January 2016, she listed finances, the low cost of living in Germany, and personal connections in Germany as reasons for her choice to study in Germany. Although her first preference was to study in Australia (she prefers to learn and speak English), she came to Germany because her brother is currently studying in another city in Germany – as members of an ethnic minority her parents were permitted to have more than one child – and because her boyfriend, who is also from China, had chosen to complete a bachelor's degree at the same university she hopes to gain admission to.

I noticed a change in Louise's behavior during the course of the year. She recounts the day she decided to begin sitting on the front row beside classmates from other countries and her growing sense of confidence with using German in classes and socially. To her, the day she began sitting on the front row was the day she decided to

make more friends and begin accepting invitations to go out with others. As a result of these choices, she has made friends with classmates from other countries and uses German as lingua franca on a daily basis, even when not in class.

When she reminisced on her experiences in 2015, she listed *einsam* (lonely), *schüchtern* (shy), and *Angst* (fear). In June 2016, she looks forward to her next semester, which will be at university, by listing words such as *Zukunft* (future), *Möglichkeiten* (possibilities), and *Universität* (university). For her, completing a bachelor’s degree in Germany will require years of preparation and study – an entire six months of language instruction before arriving in Germany, coupled with another year of language preparation at an institute and two to three semesters at a college preparatory institute. By the time she matriculates into university, she will have already spent more than two years in Germany in addition to the 800 hours of German language instruction while a high school student in China.

**Figure 4. Visual Representation of Louise’s Motivational Experiences**



## *H2: Joanna*

I end this mini gallery of learners by describing Joanna, a student from the H2 cohort. I had two interviews with Joanna – one in January 2016 and another one in late April of 2016. Like many others in her cohort, she had already been living in Germany for approximately one year by the time she enrolled as a student at the college preparatory institute. She completed 500 hours of German language instruction in China and then took part in intermediate and advanced level German courses at a private language school.

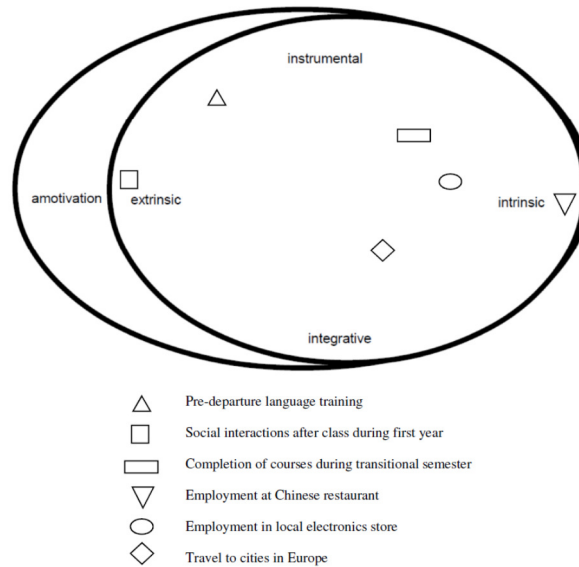
In the first interview, Joanna identified as both Chinese and a student and explained how her educational background in China affected both learning and socialization patterns. She narrated why she chose to sit in the second row in the classroom by explaining that, as a Chinese student, she believed in moderation. In the beginning, her daily schedule was relegated to going to class, eating lunch in the cafeteria with Chinese classmates, and then going home.

Joanna's socialization patterns changed drastically during the transitional semester. She enrolled in four courses voluntarily, although students have the choice to have an entire semester free, and started working two part-time jobs in her free time. In late April 2016, Joanna identified as a humanities student and did not mention her Chinese background during the hour-long qualitative interview, although she did describe in great detail the four courses she was taking for university credit.

Her two new jobs she merge both background and future. In one job, she was a waitress at a Chinese restaurant in town and in the other one she was as a customer service representative in an electronics shop. Therefore, one job required her to use both Chinese and German language skills while the other one required more German, and

she lists both jobs as providing the chance to meet new people and earn a little cash in the process.

**Figure 5. Visual Representation of Joanna’s Motivational Experiences**



All of the students I interviewed during their transitional semester shared two traits in common. They all took part-time jobs and they all began traveling to other cities in Germany and Europe, either with groups or alone. These two activities demonstrate a greater sense of independence while abroad – after all, only one of the students in this group had worked previously – and further highlight that identities and social behaviors profoundly change during the initial phases of the study abroad process.

### **Continuums**

As the mini gallery has demonstrated, the identity and motivational factors for all of the student participants I interviewed more than once changed considerably during the course of two semesters. For many, the types of motivations present in using and acquiring German also shifted, as did socialization patterns. Sara’s motivation in learning German was initially intrinsic, yet this motivation changed slightly to also

include extrinsic motivation, or learning the language well to achieve high marks. Throughout both semesters, she continually demonstrated integrative and instrumental motivation, and mentioned in both interviews her desire to begin socializing with both German native speakers and other international students who are not from China. Louise's motivations for acquiring German shifted from instrumental to integrative motivation, as she started using German to connect with other classmates and get to know others. Bill's desire to learn German initially came from a desire to access a level of higher education that his parents had not enjoyed, and his association with Mandarin grew during his time abroad to include integrative motivation, or desire to connect with the Chinese community locally. For him, learning language remains a pragmatic choice. Joanna likewise changed the way she self-identified during the course of the year; first she saw herself as mainly a Chinese student in Germany, yet later she identified as a student of humanities. This shift greatly impacted her motivation for using German, and allowed her to take up two part-time jobs – one within the Chinese community, and one in a mainly German setting – as well as to begin traveling to other cities in Europe.

When one views the motivations, identities, and social behaviors of the student participants longitudinally, it becomes apparent that these three aspects change and expand through time. For most of the participants, the longer the time abroad, the stronger the affiliations with other speakers of the target language become.

### **Summary**

The interplay between how the participants self-identify and the types of motivations that they experience for speaking German and studying in Germany expand and evolve over time. Therefore, relegating motivational types and social behaviors to



what the participants demonstrated during the initial interviews is far from accurate, and precludes the possibility that identities and motivations change to fit situation and context. At the same time, the myriad ways in which the Chinese students I interviewed self-identify and exhibit unique personality traits defy earlier descriptions that limit all students from China within a singular and static category.

What emerges from this multitude of understandings is a greater awareness that individuals both possess and comprise multiple categories. It is possible to be both collectivistic and unique, just as it is possible to display individualistic traits and still fully function as a member in a collectivistic society. A language learner can appear active in one classroom environment and passive in another. The same group of learners can be talkative in one lesson and reticent in another. A language user may be outgoing when with one group of people and withdrawn when with another. That same person can be outgoing when with one group of people and withdrawn when with the same group of people on another day or time, even if the group happens to be in the same physical location on both days. When viewed this way, static understandings of identity and motivation become obsolete, and what one takes away is an appreciation for the multidirectional interplays between contexts, situations, lived experiences, and selves. Understanding such richness and depth remains impossible unless individuals are considered unique.

## **Concluding Remarks**

### **Introduction**

In this thesis, I have considered the living and learning encounters of 27 Chinese students in Germany as they prepare to matriculate into the German higher educational system as undergraduates. I have also investigated pre-departure language training, motivations for studying abroad, and the learning and socialization patterns of each participant. This research offers a glimpse into how identities and motivations move dynamically across not one, but several, continuums, and cannot be relegated to the limitations of a single framework.

Using the autoethnographic approach, I explored how my interactions with student participants evolved. I discovered through this self-study that I had several preconceived ideas of Chinese international students that directly impacted how I interacted with and perceived the participants. My tendency to register them as sharing the same identity initially prevented me from gaining a deeper perspective regarding social and communicative behavior. Once I began interacting on an individual level, I was able to view situations and events in light of multiple experiences. I also gained the ability to see identities, personalities, and motivations through a more colorful and accurate lens only after I realized the wide array of personalities displayed by the participants.

Through my research, I discovered that it is possible for someone to have both collective and personal identities and that these filter into motivations for learning and social behaviors (Eccles, 2009). I conclude that distinguishing between collectivistic and individualistic societies should not impede our ability to see others from many

angles, regardless of national origin or personal background. In chapter three, I reflect on the tendency to overgeneralize students from Asia and recount a classroom environment in which the most active learners either had previously failed or were later required to repeat an entire semester's coursework. While this result cannot be generalized to every classroom environment (Cheng, 2000), it suggests the need to rethink the common assumption that vocal students will inevitably be the most successful.

### **Theoretical and Policy Implications**

Like Kennedy (2002), Sit (2013), and Wachob (2002), I contend that the homogenization of Chinese students prevents a deeper awareness regarding the learning approaches of Chinese students. Instead of investigating the full array of transitions that occur during study abroad, most of the literature focuses on personal (e.g., Guan, 2007; e.g., Song, 2009; e.g., Sun, 2010), academic (e.g., Luo & Kück, 2011; e.g., Sun, 2008; e.g., Zhu, 2012), and intercultural (e.g., Li & Stodolska, 2006; e.g., Li, 2010; e.g., Yan & Berliner, 2009) hardships inherent to study abroad. Many works consider why Chinese students may be reticent in class (e.g., Han, 2006; e.g., Sun, 2010; e.g., Xu, 2008; e.g., Zhao & Stork, 2010), despite the fact that "some students are very active, some are very passive, and some are in between" (Cheng, 2000, p. 439). As a result, much of the literature is riddled with discussions that focus on what we perceive to be negative aspects of the Chinese learning tradition, such as traditional teaching methods (Huang, 2006).

A consistent portrayal of Western teaching methods as superior makes itself apparent even in instances when we investigate why Chinese students score higher on

assessment tasks (Ho, 2009), a move that we rationalize by overgeneralizing Chinese learners as reticent and passive (Cheng, 2000). We view the Western tradition favorably, and overlook the Chinese perspective, which recognizes memorization as a technique that contributes to deep learning (Kennedy, 2002, pp. 433-434). Implicitly, what arises is the conclusion that Western learning traditions are superior to those from Asia, and that exporting Western educational models to China is therefore an inherently positive development (e.g., Hongjie, 2001).

In popular literature, one also sees the tendency to either speak distastefully of all Chinese international students as one entity (Horstmann, 2014) or to use anecdotal examples of single students to illustrate the shortcomings or struggles of all Chinese international students (e.g., Belkin & Jordan, 2016, para. 1-10; e.g., Richter, 2014, para.1-2; e.g., Schrein, 2014, para. 2). The consistent use of such clichés harks back to a discursive tradition that frames the superior West against the timid East for the purposes of rationalizing Western imperialism (see Said, 1978). Although Said's (1978) work focuses on the Middle East, the widespread use of these discursive practices indicates, as Vukovich (2013) contends, that Orientalism exists for China as well.

The overreliance on binary oppositions such as collectivistic and individualistic societies in most of the literature on Chinese international students remains problematic. Ironically, Hofstede carried out his empirical work on the differences between individualistic and collectivistic societies with the awareness that “the cultural systems of nations and of their subdivisions are very complex and cannot be described in simple terms” (Hofstede, 1984, p. 82). Despite this concession, we continually employ the

individualistic-collectivistic paradigm to overgeneralize differences between Chinese and Western societies.

The culmination of my research findings suggests the error in grouping Chinese international students together for purposes of recruitment and enrollment. This situation is apparent in the United States. Although Chinese students constitute “one-third of international-student growth at American colleges and universities” in 2015 (IIE, 2015, as cited in Belkin & Jordan, 2016, para. 14), an overwhelming tendency to segregate Chinese international students still exists. Theoretically speaking, we must change the conversation about Chinese students to allow the possibility for a full range of learners (Cheng, 2000; Zhou, 2010) instead of continuing to rely on caricatures of passive learners (Kennedy, 2002). From a policy perspective, institutions that recruit large numbers of student from China also inherit the duty of providing institutional support and understanding, such as academic orientation workshops, crisis prevention, social activities, and instructor training sessions.

### **Directions for Further Research**

In this thesis, I have considered the pre-departure expectations and experiences of 27 Chinese international students as they prepare to matriculate in the German higher educational system. Further research in this area has much potential. In light of the paucity of identity studies that investigate the identities and motivations of Chinese students abroad, I advocate more in-depth research that focuses on how identities work together with motivations and social choices and how these impact the study abroad experience.

My study was longitudinal in nature and took place over two semesters, and I employed an autoethnographic approach. While this was most helpful for reflecting on my own actions, it also meant regarding myself as both the subject and object of my research (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). As a result, much of the data I gathered on the progression of identity and social behavior of the student participants was not recounted in this thesis. In further studies, I aim to continue using this data set with those participants who have expressed consent and systematically analyze how the identities, motivations, and social behaviors of the participants evolved over time. I also plan to continue interacting with several of the student participants in the future to more fully grasp the changes that occur after they have become full-time undergraduate students in Germany.

### **Final Departure**

My experiences through research and interaction have shown me that the question I originally intended to answer – why are Chinese students isolated and reticent – is based on a series of preconceptions, and leads nowhere. The notion that all international students need or even want to integrate is not necessarily true. At the same time, there have been hundreds of surveys and qualitative studies with Chinese students about learning and socialization patterns. The results inevitably lead to discussions that frame the West as superior, with implicit undertones that surface behaviors, such as speaking up in class, determine or measure a student's success. We have to change our mindset that talkative learners master material best and that all international students have the wish to integrate. These are ethnocentric values we have transposed onto education.

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## Appendix A: Class Schedule

### Semester One (S1)

<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
<b>8:00-9:30</b>	(H1)	(H1)	(E2)
<b>10:00-11:30</b>	(H1)		(H2)
<b>11:45-1:15</b>	(E1)	(E1)	

### Semester Two (S2)

	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>
<b>10:00-11:30</b>		(H1)	(H1)
<b>11:45-1:15</b>	(E1)		(E1)



## **Appendix B: Pilot Interview Questions for Students**

1. Would you tell me how long you have been studying in Germany?
2. May I know how long you have been learning German?
3. Could you describe a situation in which learning in Germany was positive for you?
4. Would you tell me about a time when learning in Germany was difficult for you?
5. What would you say about your life as a student in Germany?
6. Can you tell me of a time when being a student has been difficult/easy for you?
7. Would you tell me of an experience with other students that was positive?
8. Would you say that you have a lot of friends in Germany?
9. How do you meet others in Germany?
10. Is there anything you would like to add?

## **Appendix C: First Round of Interview Questions for Students**

1. Would you tell me how long you have been studying in Germany?
2. May I know how long you have been learning German?
3. What is the difference between learning German in your hometown and in Germany?  
  
(or: What is the difference between learning German at the institute and here?)
4. What do you want to study at university? Can you tell me how you made that decision?
5. Could you describe a situation in which learning in Germany was positive for you?
6. What would you say about your life as a student in Germany?
7. Can you tell me of a time when being a student has been difficult/easy for you?
8. Would you tell me of an experience with other students that was positive?
9. Would you say that you have a lot of friends in Germany?
10. Is there anything you would like to add?

## **Appendix D: Interview Questions for Instructors**

1. Would you tell me how long you have been teaching in Germany?
2. May I know how long you have been teaching German?
3. Could you describe a situation in which teaching German was positive for you?
4. Can you tell me of a time when teaching German was difficult?
5. How would you describe a good student?
6. In your opinion, what does a good instructor do?
7. How have students changed during your career?
8. Would you say that it is possible for a good student to fail coursework here?
9. What kind of advice would you give international students who wish to succeed at university in Germany?
10. Is there anything you would like to add?