

**MAINLAND CHINESE STUDENTS’  
ADJUSTMENT TO STUDYING AND LIVING  
IN HONG KONG**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at the University of Leicester**

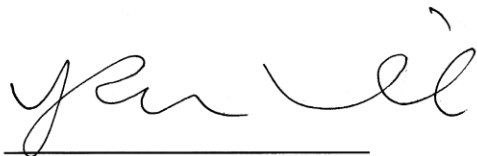
**by**

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**November 2009**

## **DECLARATION**

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Xie Xinyan', is written over a horizontal line.

**CHRISTINA XINYAN XIE**

# **MAINLAND CHINESE STUDENTS' ADJUSTMENT TO STUDYING AND LIVING IN HONG KONG**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is concerned with the growing phenomenon of mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong universities and the lifestyle and academic adjustment process they undergo in terms of living and studying. Since 2005, Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been invited to participate in the national universities' admission system of China and recruit yearly the brightest students in increasing numbers from the mainland.

The aim of this research project is to explain why mainland Chinese students opt to complete their higher education in Hong Kong and understand the issues mainland students face when going to live and study in Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions, including the difficulties they encounter and the adaptation strategies they develop as well as their future plans after graduation.

The study draws insight from a qualitative research approach within an interpretivist paradigm. Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with nineteen mainland students studying in the University in Hong Kong. The case study approach was used in order to study individual cases. The purpose of this study is not to test a theory; rather, its aim is to explore the mainland students' experiences regarding the phenomenon of cultural and personal adjustment they make when leaving their homeland in order to live and study in Hong Kong. To this end, the study conceptualises the adaptation process, and by so doing, contributes to a developing body of theory on internationalisation of higher education and students studying overseas.

In terms of its contribution to the literature, this study found that mainland students chose Hong Kong for the completion of their higher education for societal, economic, educational, familial and personal reasons. As the difficulties they encountered in doing so were often based on their individual circumstances, each developed his/her own strategies to overcome them. Importantly, although encountering initial challenges regarding living and studying in Hong Kong, the mainland students eventually prefer to stay and work in Hong Kong after graduation.

The study offers an Emergent Model to describe the experiences and adaptation strategies of mainland students during their sojourn in Hong Kong. This model is derived from students' perspectives about their experiences and their decision-making in adopting adaptation strategies as means of coping. This project contributes to the emerging research tradition of comparative cross-cultural studies. At the same time, it has implications for the development of theory, practice and future research in the internationalisation of higher education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I feel very fortunate in having Professor Clive Dimmock as my supervisor. In the past few years, he has spent much of his time reviewing my work. The valuable guidance and advice that he provided throughout the whole period of my Doctorate of Education study, along with his patience and tolerance, have made this journey not only possible but also enjoyable and filled with academic challenges.

Moreover I would like to express my special appreciation to Dr. Howard Stevenson who had been my previous supervisor. His full support at the first stage of my study was immeasurable and his serious attitude towards research and teaching served as an excellent role model for my graduate studies as well as for my career as a university teacher. He helped me clarify the ideas in the assignments for the various modules of study and to shape the theme of this thesis.

My special thanks also go to those lecturers from the University of Leicester, who have taught at the Hong Kong School each year. Their teaching has sparked my scholarly interest in the field of educational leadership and management and has provided insights into my work in educational development.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the nineteen mainland students who came to Hong Kong for their studies for giving their invaluable contribution, without which this study would not have been possible. They have joyfully and gracefully shared with me their experiences of living and studying in Hong Kong. It is my wish to see that the findings of this research, in turn, contribute to helping mainland students find their best means of settlement in Hong Kong, and possibly in the world.

To the Department of Chinese and Bilingual Studies and all those, in my family and at work, who have directly or indirectly helped with this study, I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation and gratitude.

Finally and most importantly, I am very grateful to my two lovely girls, Luna and Celina, for their endless support in their own ways and for sharing many interesting thoughts with me throughout the study.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE ISSUES IN CONTEXT**

#### **1.1 Statement of the Research Problem**

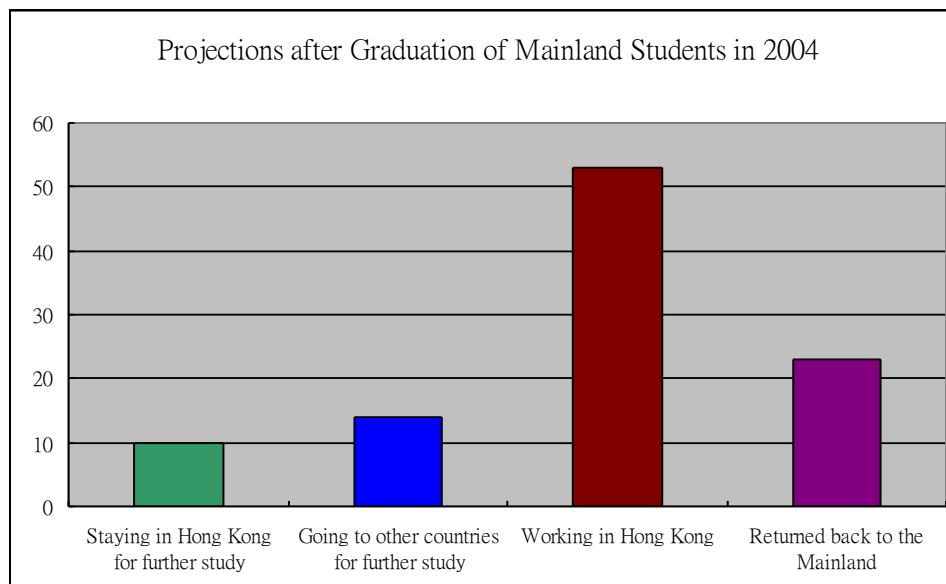
This thesis is about the growing phenomenon of mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong universities and the adjustment process they undergo in settling in. Since 2005 Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions have been invited to take part in the Chinese national universities' admission system. Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions are planning to recruit more of the brightest students each year from mainland China (Buchanan 2005).

The PRC Ministry of Education has given permission for the eight Hong Kong universities to use the National Joint Colleges and Universities Enrolment System. The Hong Kong universities were allowed to recruit students from 17 provinces and cities from the mainland in 2005. Full scholarships were offered to at least 75 mainland students at each university by the Hong Kong Education and Manpower Bureau under a \$45 million plan inspired by the success of a scholarship programme run by the Hong Kong Jockey Club. The plan aimed to provide scholarships for 150 students in the current and coming academic years on a matched funding basis, with universities expected to meet half the cost (Heron, L. 2005). The Hong Kong Immigration Department and Security Bureau relaxed immigration controls to allow more non-local students from the mainland into Hong Kong in September 2005. The proposals included admitting students for sub-degree programmes as well as undergraduate (UG) studies. The current undergraduate yearly quota for mainland students out of the total number of university students was increased from 4% to 8% in September 2005.

Within this scheme, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, for example, admitted 250 mainland students in September 2005; City University admitted 150 mainland students; and the Hong Kong X University (named in this study as the University) admitted 800 mainland students to meet the quota of 8% of a total of 10,000 undergraduate students. It is clear, therefore, that Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions would be welcoming a very significant number of mainland students in the coming years. This process has already begun and is likely to accelerate.

Based on the information provided by the University, the projections for future employment and study for mainland graduates in 2004 indicated that 10% of mainland graduates stayed in Hong Kong for further study, 15% went overseas for further study, 55% of graduates stayed in Hong Kong for employment, and 25% returned to China for further development.

In a meeting organised by the Hong Kong Association of Mainland Graduates on April 10, 2005 in the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, when the question was asked how many students were planning to stay in Hong Kong after their graduation, most students raised their hands. They believed that Hong Kong would provide a better future.



**Figure 1.** Projections after Graduation of Mainland Students in 2004

(Source: Brochure to welcome mainland students to the University, 2005)

Hong Kong attracts mainland students for numerous reasons. Quality of life is a key factor. Under the law of “One Country, Two Systems”, Hong Kong has its own legal system inherited from the 150 years of British rule, which is different from Chinese law in mainland China. Hong Kong has an independent judicial power and has its own fully fledged legal system. Chinese is the official language of Hong Kong but, unlike mainland China, English may also be used as an official language in Hong Kong. In most Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions, English is used as a medium of instruction

except in some Chinese language or China-related courses. Hong Kong has been able to preserve its way of life and its financial system after the reversion to China in July 1997. The city remains a world class financial, economic and artistic centre. These attractions prove persuasive to many mainland Chinese students as they assess their future in an increasingly globalised world in which China sees itself as a key player. The wealth, high living standards, life style and westernisation of Hong Kong are obviously attractive to mainland students.

There are four sets of problems that justify analysis of this thesis: the first is the reasons why mainland Chinese students choose Hong Kong for their higher education; the second is to understand the experiences that mainland Chinese students have while they live and study in Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions; the third concerns adaptation strategies adopted by mainland Chinese students in order to adjust to living and studying in Hong Kong; the fourth concerns the intentions of mainland students after graduation. These four sets of problems are related to and influence the success of mainland students in Hong Kong.

## **1.2 Research Aims and Purposes**

The aim of this research project is first, to make a theoretical contribution that helps explain the reasons why mainland Chinese students opt to study overseas rather than stay in China for their higher education and the reasons they choose Hong Kong in particular; second, the study seeks to capture the experiences of mainland Chinese students living and studying in Hong Kong; third, to identify their adaptation strategies as they adjust to this different institutional, societal and cultural context; and finally, this project aims to explore these mainland students' plans after graduation from a Hong Kong institution.

The study is based on the perspectives of the students themselves. These objectives give rise to the following research questions.

### 1.3 Research Questions

There are **four** Research Questions (RQ) that are divided into **seven** Specific Research Questions (SRQ):

- (RQ1) Why do mainland Chinese students choose Hong Kong for their higher education?
- (RQ2) What experiences do mainland Chinese students have while living and studying in Hong Kong?
- (RQ3) How do mainland Chinese students adapt to living and studying in Hong Kong?
- (RQ4) What future plans, if any, do the mainland Chinese students have after graduation in Hong Kong?

The seven Specific Research Questions provide the framework for the research to be undertaken in this thesis. In order to answer Research Question 1, the following are the Specific Research Questions:

- SRQ 1 Why do mainland Chinese students opt to study overseas rather than stay in China for their higher education?
- SRQ 2 What are the reasons for mainland Chinese students choosing Hong Kong for their higher education rather than elsewhere overseas?

To answer Research Question 2, the following are the Specific Research Questions:

- SRQ 3 What are the living experiences of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong?
- SRQ 4 What are the studying experiences of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong?

To answer Research Question 3, the following are the Specific Research Questions:

- SRQ 5 In what ways do mainland Chinese students adapt to living in Hong Kong?

**SRQ 6** In what ways do mainland Chinese students adapt to studying in Hong Kong?

To answer Research Question 4, the following is the Specific Research Question:

**SRQ 7** What plans do mainland Chinese students have after graduation in Hong Kong?

## **1.4 Significance and Outcomes of the Study**

The research addresses the fact that cultural adjustment shapes the experiences of mainland students as they study in a Hong Kong university. The research will focus on different levels of cultural adjustment faced by these students, including societal culture (Hong Kong), institutional culture and the learning experience of the students. Students may be challenged to adapt to all of these levels. Each level may pose specific challenges and require specific strategies, although the challenges of adjusting may differ for each individual.

This is an important area of research because the problem it seeks to address is of growing significance in Hong Kong. As indicated, there are already a significant number of mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions and this trend is likely to continue as travel restrictions for mainland Chinese are progressively liberalised. Mainland Chinese students and Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions have a common interest in ensuring that when mainland Chinese students take up places in Hong Kong universities, they complete their courses of study successfully. Thus, it is crucial to minimise the impact of any “culture shock” and to enable the students to settle as quickly as possible into the new environment. In particular, it is important to meet those students’ needs, which may arise from a lack of cultural “fit” in a different organisational and societal culture.

Few, if any, studies have looked at this problem. Most previous research has focused on Chinese students studying in the US, Europe, Japan, Singapore, Australia and many other countries or parts of the world. There is a dearth of literature on mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong. To most observers, Hong Kong and mainland China share the

same culture and values. They believe that mainland students should not have any problem in settling in Hong Kong and completing their study. In fact, many mainland students encountered difficulties in living and studying when they went to Hong Kong for study. A small number of students found they had to quit their study or be de-registered by the university due to their poor grades or their inability to settle in Hong Kong.

The increased movement of students poses a major challenge – both for individual students and for the Higher Education Institutions that host them. There is considerable evidence that in order to provide good facilities to non-local students in Hong Kong, educational institutions need to understand the diverse cultures represented in their student body (Dimmock et al. 2005). Much of this research has focused on significant cultural differences, as between students of very different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. However, cultural differences are more significant than they appear in the case of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong universities. These students are “Chinese”, as are their fellow students who are indigenous to Hong Kong – both share the same Confucian heritage, culture and ethnic background. However, assumptions about cultural homogeneity underestimate the significant cultural adjustment mainland students must make when they go to Hong Kong to study at Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions, and subsequently, if they stay after graduation.

The findings of this study will help explain the difficulties, needs and expectations experienced by mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong. If mainland students can study successfully in Hong Kong, and if they can stay in Hong Kong after their graduation, they will become a resource of talented people contributing to the Hong Kong society. In order to be an international city in Asia and play a bridging role between China and the world, Hong Kong needs talented people who can speak three languages: Cantonese, Putonghua and English. Some of these mainland students, with their Chinese background, trilingual skills and education received from Hong Kong institutions, can make a significant contribution to Hong Kong after their graduation.

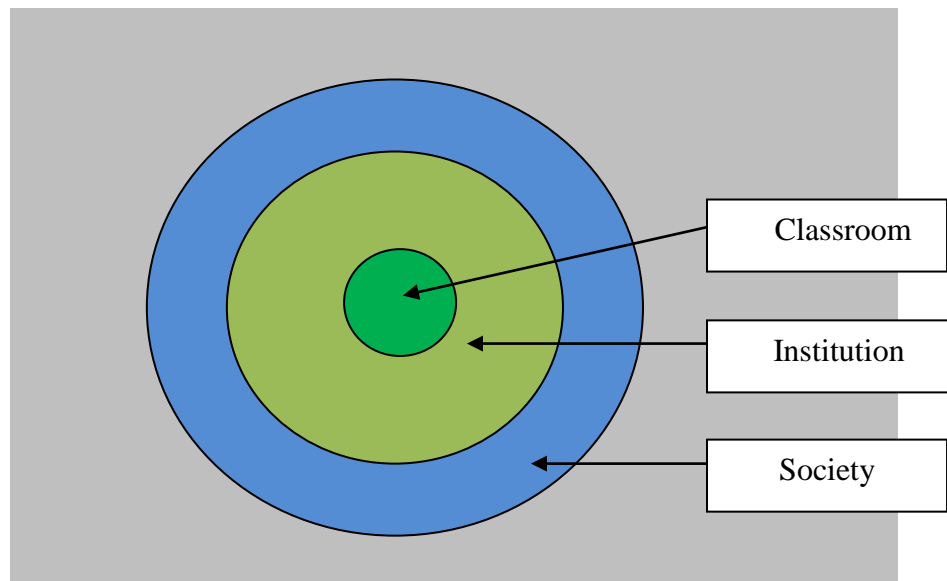
The findings of this study may be helpful for future mainland students to find a better way to adapt more smoothly and quickly in Hong Kong educational environment. It might also help them to integrate into Hong Kong society after their graduation. This will help mainland students contribute to Hong Kong society, and will help Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions better integrate the mainland students.



## 1.5 Assumptions and Background to the Study

There are two assumptions being made. The first is that whenever students leave home to study in another place, there is a process of adjustment. The second assumption is that when they choose to study in another country or culture – often with a different language – the adjustment process is magnified.

An assumption in this study is that mainland students experience cultural difference when they go to live in Hong Kong and study in Hong Kong universities. In short, there are degrees of “cultural dissonance” and as a consequence students need to make “cultural adjustments”. As stated earlier, this may seem surprising because both Hong Kong and mainland students share a Confucian heritage: they are all Chinese. Yet, there are significant *societal*, *institutional*, and *educational* (the classroom) differences. Each of these is briefly outlined as follows:



**Figure 2.** Three Levels of Cultural Differences

### 1.5.1 Societal Culture

The cultural differences between China and Hong Kong can be expressed at the societal level. Traditional Chinese values and the Western cultural values co-exist in Hong Kong. Dimmock (2000) indicates that the contemporary culture of the Hong Kong Chinese is a blend of Western culture grafted onto historically ingrained Chinese culture (p.196).

In sociological terms, culture is “a design for living” or “a way of life” as defined by Leung (1996a; 1996b). The Hong Kong way of life is the way how Hong Kong people think and act. Leung agrees that Hong Kong culture is made up of a mix of traditional Chinese and Western cultural norms. Most Hong Kong people believe that their personal goal is to make as much money as possible without breaking the law. They want the individual freedom to pursue economic goals with minimal intervention from the government (Leung 1996b, p.56).

Hong Kong's distinctive indigenous culture has, more recently, been described as “egotistical individualism” by Lau and Kuan (1990, pp.766-781), and an interaction of the themes of survival, affluence and deliverance (Chan 1993). When we analyse Hong Kong societal culture, we need to see it from both sides: traditional Chinese culture and modern Western culture. Morris and Lo (2000), however, warn that, “an interpretation of the curriculum/culture fit solely reliant on a Confucianism/Western dichotomy would fail to capture the diverse and fragmented nature of this society” (pp.175-88).

While China is an authentic Confucian society, traditional Chinese values are deeper and more solid in the mainland. Cheng and Wong (1996) summarise that the traditional societal values from Confucianism include mainly four basic elements. The first value concerns comfort with, and some might claim preference for, hierarchical organisational structures. A second relates to respect for age. The third is the tendency to view schools as extensions of the family. As Cheng and Wong (1996) insist, in mainland China, personal connections (*Guanxi*) are often seen as a legitimate element in personnel matters such as recruitment and promotion. The fourth recognises that harmony and the preservation of relationships, which are often uppermost in the Chinese mind, may make it more difficult to confront serious personal and professional issues.

The Confucian notion about education is to change people for the better, and this ideology remains in the Chinese society and remains the purpose of education. The first words of one of the most influential works of Chinese philosophy, entitled “Three Word Poems” are: “People's nature was kind when they were born”. The ancient Chinese philosophers believed that people were born kind but society polluted them, therefore the purpose of education was to change people back to their natural state. Bush and Qiang (2002) define the traditional Chinese culture according to four aspects: worshipping tradition, adoring authority, stressing collectivism, and emphasising ethical and moral self-cultivation

(p.175). These values of traditional Chinese culture are reflected in traditional education methods and the relationship between teachers and students.

### ***1.5.2 Institutional Culture***

The differences at the institutional level are often seen in the relationship between teachers and students. Watkins and Biggs (1996) have noted the contrast between the collective emphasis in mainland China and the individual orientation in Hong Kong. In mainland China, social relations between teacher and student, and student and student, are as complex as one might expect in a collectivistic culture. Students live on campus in dormitories, and unsurprisingly this environment facilitates a tremendous amount of collective activities, including academic discussions and study groups. The teachers live on campus too, often in the same building as their students, giving rise to much teacher-student interaction outside the classroom. Although teacher-student relations may be strongly hierarchical compared with those in the West, they are also typically marked if not by warmth then by a sense of responsibility and mutual respect. While in Hong Kong, students and teachers tend not to live in the same place and do not have much contact after class. Organised peer learning can work well in Hong Kong schools. Hong Kong students actually prefer a more collaborative learning environment, which they believe would promote deeper, more achievement-oriented approach to learning (Watkins & Biggs 1996, p.275).

Students' levels of independence in Hong Kong and the mainland are different. In Hong Kong students are free to choose their place of residence, academic courses, academic schedule, and extracurricular activities. In the mainland all of these are decided or organised by the university or the departments students are studying in.

In mainland China students are tightly integrated into small groups; the principal groups for most students are their roommates and their classmates. Since there is relatively little choice of courses for Chinese students, their academic schedules are largely determined on a group basis. These class collectives are often stable over the three or four years that the students spend at the institution. A Chinese student at a large university has little social contact with those who entered the institution simultaneously, and even less with those who entered at other times. His/her social life is intensely focused on roommates

and members of the class collective. This is a natural outcome of the collectivist value system (Hu & Grove 1999, p.74).

### ***1.5.3 Classroom Culture: Learning and Teaching***

Hong Kong students and mainland students may differ in their learning methods. However, relatively little research has taken place on different approaches to learning among Chinese students.

Luk and Wei (2002) did a comparative study of strategies adopted by primary students in four Chinese cities in solving mathematical problems, and found that the way students found solutions varies from cities in the mainland China and Hong Kong. Xu (2002) studied Chinese students' adaptation to learning in an American university, and found that Chinese students have great difficulties in adjusting to the US system. The study followed the process of Chinese international graduates adapting to the US teaching and learning system and identified the coping strategies they utilised in the adaptation. Gale (2002) attempted to understand the experience of a group of Chinese students in an Australian university, the significance of environmental variables, and the context of learning, in order to provide an account that was "mindful of individuals, but also of learning environments that frame both institutional practices and individual experiences" (p.66). The author adopts an "ecological" positioning in an attempt to understand the learning experience of a group of Chinese students in Higher Education, the significance of environmental variables, and the context of learning.

This study focuses on a university in Hong Kong, where the teaching medium of instruction is English, but the language of daily life is Cantonese. The participants in this study are nineteen students from mainland China and have been in Hong Kong for less than a year (Group I) or more than a year (Group II). These students were pursuing their undergraduate studies in different departments at the University.

The cultural adjustment of mainland students in Hong Kong context is particularly relevant here. For example, Morris et al. (1997) argue that it is a mistake to generalise across East and South-East Asian societies because there are significant cultural differences between Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. Important cultural differences exist even among Chinese societies. For example, the status of schoolteachers is high in

the mainland and low in Hong Kong. The relationship between teacher and students is closer in the mainland than in Hong Kong.

Whilst mainland students must adapt in order to study in other environments, Dimmock (2000) suggests that educational institutions need to change too if they are to meet the needs and aspirations of their clientele and remain relevant and valued (p.5). He also points out that global searches for effective schools are of limited utility unless they take account of the cultural contexts within which those schools have evolved. What is an 'effective' school in one culture may not be thought of in the same way in another. What works in one culture may not work in another. 'Effective' schools need, therefore, to be seen in cultural context, a perspective requiring the development of cross-cultural frameworks (Dimmock 2000, p.13). The same may be true of universities.

## **1. 6 Outline of Chapters in the Thesis**

This thesis is structured into seven chapters. *Chapter 1* is the Introduction, which states the research problem, outlines the research aims and purposes, poses the research questions, and indicates the significance and outcomes of the study.

A review of literature constitutes *Chapter 2* which will focus on the differences between Chinese in mainland society and Hong Kong society, emphasising the different cultures and values that influence the institutional and classroom culture.

*Chapter 3* discusses research methodology, in particular the project's case study approach, and outlines the specific procedures for this study. Interviews with nineteen Chinese mainland students were the basic methodology to collect data. At the first stage fifteen students were interviewed and at a later stage four students were interviewed, as the researcher found that the previous interviews did not receive sufficient data on Research Questions 1 and 4.

*Chapter 4* and *Chapter 5* provide answers to the research questions. *Chapter 4* analyses the findings to the Research Question 1 (RQ1) and Research Question 2 (RQ2), and *Chapter 5* analyses the findings to the Research Question 3 (RQ3) and Research Question 4 (RQ4).

*Chapter 6* compares the findings for each research question with previous literature. It builds on existing literature by focusing on mainland students' experiences in Hong Kong, which have not been previously studied.

*Chapter 7* is the conclusion, and along with a summary of the findings to all research questions and specific research questions, it examines the generalisability and limitations of the study. It also provides the implications for theory and practice as well as recommendations to policy makers and suggestions for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This literature review chapter aims to establish a context for the current study and its contribution to the current research literature. This will be achieved by placing in perspective some of the key research findings presented by previous researchers relating to the research questions, and where possible, relevant perspectives of mainland Chinese students studying overseas and in Hong Kong on the issues under investigation:

- (RQ1)** Why do mainland Chinese students choose Hong Kong for their higher education?
- (RQ2)** What experiences do mainland Chinese students have while living and studying in Hong Kong?
- (RQ3)** How do mainland Chinese students adapt to living and studying in Hong Kong?
- (RQ4)** What future plans, if any, do the mainland Chinese students have after graduation in Hong Kong?

It is worth mentioning that although general studies abound on the difficulties encountered by foreign students in host countries, specific information on the problems encountered by mainland Chinese students is less abundant. In particular, student-specific adaptation strategies and models are scarce (Ong 2006), despite the fact that generic models for adaptation have evolved from using overseas students as research subjects and some of these studies have been perceived as universally applicable to cross-border interactions between people in all walks of life.

It needs to be stated at the beginning that it is impossible to include in this chapter or in the current study all the research findings on Chinese students pursuing their study in overseas countries and in Hong Kong. In this study, the literature review is based on research conducted in some English-speaking Western countries and, wherever available,

in Hong Kong. In this chapter, key findings related to the four research questions in the existing literature will be discussed.

Section 2.2 concentrates on the reasons why mainland Chinese students opt to study overseas and in particular why they choose to go to Hong Kong to study: this is related to RQ1.

Section 2.3 is related to RQ2 and focuses on the problems encountered by Chinese students studying overseas and in Hong Kong. It presents and discusses key research findings on difficulties encountered by mainland Chinese students studying in overseas countries and in Hong Kong in particular.

Section 2.4 looks at the research on adaptation strategies/models and is related to RQ3. Chinese student adaptation models and strategies are scarce in the research field. Hence, this section will discuss some of the generic models available in the existing literature, which explain student adaptation when studying in foreign countries.

Section 2.5 focuses on student plans to stay or leave Hong Kong after graduation, and is related to RQ4. This section presents some key research findings from academic researchers and information available in the mass media on whether mainland Chinese students intend to stay or leave Hong Kong after graduation. Finally, Section 2.6 is a summary of the chapter.

## **2.2 Reasons why Mainland Chinese Students Opt to Study Overseas and why they Choose Hong Kong to Further their Study**

### ***2.1.1 Reasons why Mainland Chinese Students Opt to Study Overseas***

First, it is important to analyse why mainland Chinese students increasingly want to study overseas. Researchers mostly agree that there are push and pull factors for Chinese families to send their children overseas. The prestige of foreign degrees and advancement in English and foreign languages are the key factors to secure a well-paid job, according to Shen (2005), Ong (2006), Li, M. (2007), Zweig & Rosen (2003).

Altbach (1998, p.240) introduced the Push-Pull factor model first for international student mobility. He explained that in earlier days students were pushed by unfavourable



conditions in their native countries and pulled, in parallel, by generous scholarships, excellent research facilities and other opportunities in host locations like the US, Canada, Australia and Europe. More recently there has been a tremendous increase of self-financed students studying overseas following the economic development of the mainland and the increased wealth of its citizens. The low tuition fees in some European countries, such as Scandinavia, Germany and France, remain cost efficient and attract many Chinese students (Shen 2005, p. 430). Li and Bray (2007) believe that "this standard push-pull model is valuable as an explanatory mechanism, but it has limitations. Both push and pull factors are external forces which impact on actors' behaviours and choices" (p. 794). They also believe that personal characteristics of the actors who, are students in this case, play a crucial role in deciding the reasons and motivations for going to study overseas and that these characteristics include social-economic status, academic ability, gender, age motivation, and aspiration (p.794).

Contrary to Li and Bray, Mazzarol and Soutar (2001) focus mainly on external mobility factors of students from Taiwan, mainland China, India and Indonesia. For them, there are four motivating factors: 1) an overseas course of study is viewed as better than a local one; 2) students ability to gain entry to particular programmes, 3) a desire to improve understanding of foreign societies, and 4) an intention to migrate after graduation (p.51). Mazzarol and Soutar (2001) showed that the top factors for mainland students in Australia included institutional reputation of quality, willingness to recognize previous qualifications, and provision of degrees that were recognized by employers. The author of the current study is not sure whether these four factors are relevant to mainland students when deciding to study in Hong Kong, as Hong Kong is not considered a foreign society; most programmes offered by Hong Kong universities are also available in mainland China.

Different from the above researchers, Zheng (2003), when analysing the high-achievement of undergraduate students in Tsinghua University and Beijing University, discovered that the factors that shaped students' intentions to study overseas could be divided into six groups: economic factors, educational factors, personal factors, social factors, cultural factors and political factors. Among these, economic, educational and personal factors were the most important determinants. This matches with the theory of Li and Bray (2007), but with some variations. The latter sees these factors as

personal factors, while the former sees them as external forces. For example, for Li and Bray, economic motives include access to scholarships, academic motives include pursuit of qualifications and professional development, and social and cultural factors include a desire to obtain experience and understanding of other societies. For Zheng, the educational factors indicate that home countries and institutions may not only have limited intake ability, but at the same time, host countries and institutions can offer these students entry to universities and allow them to study their favoured programmes.

Similar to Zheng, Pang and Appleton (2004) indicated that most students and scholars studied in the US as an immigration path to stay in that country:

Factors influencing their decisions to immigrate to the United States included lack of professional opportunities, recurrent intrusion of the state into individuals' lives, the residual mistrust of intellectuals and related political instability (of home country). Four factors emerged in the decisions of participants to come to the US. They were 1) desire for more education, 2) educational preparation, 3) financial support and 4) escape from unpleasant situations in China.

(Pang & Appleton 2004, p.506)

Push and Pull factors were not used as clear terms in Pang and Appleton's research, but their reasons for mainland students and scholars to leave China and immigrate to the US are similar to the Push-Pull factors model suggested by Altbach (1998).

### ***2.2.2 Reasons why Mainland Students Choose Hong Kong to Further their Study***

There are three reasons why mainland Chinese choose Hong Kong, according to Li and Bray (2007): first, they could not secure university entrance at home universities so they sought places outside mainland China, including in Hong Kong and Macau; second, some perceived studying in Hong Kong as prestigious, because "universities around the world distinguished themselves from counterparts in mainland China by their media of instruction and the quality of their academic staff" (p.797); third, the Hong Kong government has developed a series of policies to encourage Higher Education Institutions to recruit mainland Chinese students to Hong Kong. These policies include easing the

restrictions on study visas, giving scholarships to outstanding students, and allowing applications to Hong Kong universities at the same time as they apply to mainland universities.

A survey was conducted at Hong Kong University (HKU) and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) by Li, M. (2006) in 2002-2003 and 323 responses were collected on mainland students' motives for enrolling in Hong Kong institutions. The response showed that the dominant motivations were 1) academic (69%); 2) social and cultural (63.3%); 3) economic (51.7%); and 4) competitive advantage in the employment market (45.2%) (Li, M. 2006). Most Chinese parents and students see higher education as a means for maintaining or improving their social class status. Thus, Li and Bray (2007) claim that the academic reason for deciding to go to Hong Kong is driven by the pursuit of a higher social status for those students and parents in a lower social class, and a desire to maintain a higher social class for those who already had it.

Enrolling in Hong Kong universities has many advantages over studying in foreign institutions, as Table 1 shows. These advantages include geographic, social and cultural, financial and educational aspects:

**Table 1. Advantages of Studying in Hong Kong**

Advantages of studying in Hong Kong	Percentage
	(Total number of participants: 177)
Geographic proximity	43%
Social and cultural identity	39%
Merger of eastern and western culture	37.8%
Bridge between China and outside	28.2%
Financial support, scholarship	58.8%
Research/teaching related to China's reality	9.6%
More exchange with mainland	26%
No advantage	5.1%
Others	1.7%

(Source: Perceived advantages of Hong Kong, Li & Bray 2007, p. 807)

The three most important educational factors for mainland Chinese students to choose Hong Kong to further their study are facilities and resources, quality of education and scholarships (Li & Bray 2007, p.812). Most participants in that study were scholarship holders. People should be aware that there are more self-financed mainland students in Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions, and the majority of them depend on their family to provide financial support to cover tuition and living expenses. Only a very small number of outstanding students are offered generous scholarships of \$100,000HKD per year from Hong Kong institutions to cover living expenses and tuition. Some, however, are offered a partial scholarship to cover only the tuition fees of \$60,000HKD per year.

### **2.3 Difficulties Encountered by Mainland Chinese Students Studying Overseas and in Hong Kong**

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of mainland Chinese students when they go to live and study in Hong Kong, this section will review existing literature on difficulties experienced by mainland Chinese students studying and living in Hong Kong and in overseas countries. Research in this area is mostly limited to the USA, Canada, the UK and Singapore. Relatively little research has been conducted on mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong. Therefore a review of relevant studies on mainland Chinese students in overseas countries in conjunction with those on their counterparts in Hong Kong is appropriate and conducive to a deeper understanding of the experiences by mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong, and facilitative of the inter-subjective interpretation of the respondents' perceived realities between the researcher and the respondents (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

In recent years, the difficulties encountered by mainland Chinese students studying overseas have been the subject of much research. Cheng (2000) conceptualised that these difficulties occurred at three levels: societal, institutional, and classroom. Furnham & Bochner (1986) listed three difficulties: negative life events and illnesses, lack of social support networks, and value differences. Sun and Chen (1997) identified three types of difficulties encountered by mainland Chinese students in the US: lack of language proficiency, a deficiency in cultural awareness, and academic concerns due to the differences in teaching and learning styles between Chinese and American academic settings.

In sum, previous researchers (Arthur 1997; Sun & Chen 1997; Chen 1996) have cited five common difficulties confronting mainland Chinese students studying overseas: (1) language hurdles, (2) financial stress, (3) perplexing approaches to learning and teaching, (4) “indifferent” teachers and (5) different social and cultural environments. In this project, the perspectives of the participants will illuminate whether they encountered similar issues in the Hong Kong context.

Building on Cheng’s (2000) conceptual model, the above dimensions can be viewed as occurring at three levels. Differing from Cheng’s (2000) model, however, the three-level framework adopted here will include the individual level to complement the original model, while the original institutional and classroom levels will be merged for ease of review and discussion. Accordingly, dimensions (1) and (2) in the previous paragraph - language hurdles and financial stress - can be described as occurring at the *individual* level. Issues in dimensions (3) and (4) – perplexing approaches to learning and teaching, and “indifferent” teachers - can be described as occurring at the *institutional and classroom* level. Issues in dimensions (5) - different social and cultural environment - can be described as occurring at the *societal level*. In the following sections, findings in each of these dimensions by previous researchers will be discussed.

### **2.3.1    *Language Hurdles***

The issue of understanding and using colloquial language in the host country is a worldwide phenomenon among students of diverse nationalities studying in foreign countries (Ong 2006, p.31). Existing literature has suggested that language hurdles constitute one of the most common obstacles facing mainland Chinese students living and studying overseas and have had a significant impact on their life and study (Li, Z. 2000; Zhang 2001; Ong 2006).

Li, Z. (2000) examined the stress experienced by mainland Chinese students in the UK, focusing on the general well-being and stress levels among the survey participants, and the degree of stress under which these students were placed by individual factors at the beginning and the end of term. The study showed that stress levels did not vary significantly between the beginning and the end of the term. The most important sources of stress were academic: essay writing, literacy and participating in discussions (Li, Z. 2000). This suggests that language issues persist among mainland Chinese students for a long period of time. However, it is unclear from this study whether the issues were solved,

how long it took for the issues to be solved and how they were solved.

More recently, Ong (2006) found that among mainland Chinese students in Singapore, language anxiety is the biggest difficulty, followed by cultural problems, societal and living environment problems, and difficulties related to learning and teaching styles (p.30). Ong further suggested that the language problem often surfaces to trouble these Chinese students for many months. For many such students it will be the first time they have had lectures in English. Their language difficulties may mean that they need to spend a long time studying by themselves, which may result in a lack of social life, and which in turn, may eventually affect their overall psychological, social and physical well-being (Ong 2006, p.35). Although Chinese are the ethnic majority both in Hong Kong and in Singapore, the language issues facing mainland Chinese students in Singapore may not be similar to that in Hong Kong, as English is widely spoken in Singapore even among the Chinese community, while in Hong Kong, the most spoken language used by the Chinese community is Chinese (Cantonese).

Nevertheless, the first group of mainland Chinese students who were admitted to Hong Kong universities in 1999 encountered language issues in their first year, although many of them performed very well subsequently (China Education and Research Network 2002). Bray and Koo (2004) argue that when mainland Chinese students go to Hong Kong, the language hurdles confronting them are twofold, as mainland Chinese and Hong Kong people use different languages. In Hong Kong, Cantonese is the most popular language and one of the official languages, while in mainland China only Putonghua is the official language. Even though both Cantonese and Putonghua are Chinese languages, each is different from the other in pronunciation, intonations, and expressions when spoken. In writing, traditional Chinese characters are used in Hong Kong while simplified characters are used in mainland China. Bray and Koo (2004) argue that, "although in Hong Kong, English and Cantonese are commonly used, English is used in the Business circle and as a medium of instruction in universities, while Cantonese is used in daily life and as one of the official languages" (p.148).

Therefore, the language hurdles facing mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong may be more formidable. Lam (2006) reported that talented mainland Chinese postgraduates were unhappy in Hong Kong as they received little support from the society as a whole and the cultural gaps deterred them from living and working in the city. Geng

(2006), president of the Hong Kong Association of Mainland Graduates, observed in a report:

Language and cultural discrepancies are two of our major hindrances, there are no or very few – language or bridging courses in universities for the mainland research students and we don't have courses that teach us about Hong Kong values and culture.

(Geng 2006, A3)

According to the report, most mainland Chinese must learn Cantonese to help them fit into the society and the university life in Hong Kong and improve their English to ensure their academic survival and success. In Hong Kong, English is considered an international language and is widely used. Its important role is evident in economic, academic and cultural life. In mainland China, all university textbooks are in Chinese although some supporting materials or handouts may be in English. Conversely, in Hong Kong almost all teaching materials are published in English. In analysing language use in Hong Kong, So (1998) found that the majority of Hong Kong people use more Cantonese and English than Putonghua. However, his respondents were mostly middle managers from a business firm rather than teachers and students. His findings are presented in Tables 2 and 3 below. Table 2 shows that Cantonese is the most spoken language at the workplace in Hong Kong and Putonghua is the least spoken, with English standing between the two. The same is true when the respondents communicate with people from outside the organisation (see Table 3).

**Table 2. Language Used in Communication within the Firm**

How often the language is used	Cantonese (%)	Oral English (%)	Putonghua (%)	Written Chinese (%)	Written English (%)
Not used	0.3	28.1	71.3	5.1	3.4
Rarely used	1.2	34.9	12.0	17.4	11.7
Occasionally used	Nil	15.4	4.7	9.3	7.4
Often used	10.1	5.5	0.7	16.1	19.8
Very often used	1.5	13.4	3.3	15.1	25.0
Used all the time	86.9	2.7	1.3	35.0	32.7
N.A.	Nil	Nil	6.7	1.9	Nil
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100

(Source: So 1998, p.163)

**Table 3. Language Used in Communication with Sources External to the Firm**

How often the language is used	Cantonese (%)	Oral English (%)	Putonghua (%)	Written Chinese (%)	Written English (%)
Not used	Nil	3.0	20.7	17.1	0.9
Rarely used	0.3	32.9	35.2	29.0	1.7
Occasionally used	1.2	24.2	17.6	15.0	2.3
Often used	5.6	24.8	3.1	7.2	22.4
Very often used	21.7	10.3	18.1	15.0	13.1
Used all the time	70.7	4.2	0.5	15.6	55.7
N.A.	0.6	0.6	4.7	1.2	3.8
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100

(Source: So 1998, p.163)

More recently, Li and Bray (2007) conducted a survey on mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong. In the survey, only 10% of the respondents viewed their English as inadequate for studying overseas. This indicates that language may not be an issue for many mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong. According to the study, some Putonghua speakers may take between a year and a few years after arriving in Hong Kong before the language barrier is overcome and communication with local Hong Kong people becomes easier. Mainland Chinese students often use English when they communicate orally with their Hong Kong counterparts in order to avoid misunderstanding.

It is worth noting that the arguments for and against the language issues facing mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong are well supported by empirical evidence. However, the



perspectives of the mainland Chinese students on the language issue have not been adequately explored. In the present study, the issue will be further investigated to clarify the perspectives of the respondents.

Although many researchers have highlighted the language issue, attempts to understand how the language problems are addressed have been limited. For example, Elsey and Kinnel (1990) studied foreign students in the UK and observed them clinging to textbooks as they contained fewer colloquialisms, which caused difficulties. In Ong's (2006) study, mainland Chinese students were found to be coping with the problem with sheer willpower. How the language problems are being addressed in Hong Kong by mainland Chinese students remains an under-explored area.

### **2.3.2 *Financial Stress***

Previous literature has discussed financial stress as another difficulty experienced by mainland Chinese students in adapting to the host countries (Cheng 1999; Arthur 1997; Chen 1996), although few of these studies have been conducted in Hong Kong. Financial difficulties experienced by mainland Chinese students are worth investigation as their effects are manifested in other areas of the students' lives.

Zeng (1997) found that in the UK Chinese students' reluctance to socialise with local students came from lack of financial resources. Many Chinese students found interacting with UK students quite difficult, not just due to the language issue, but also due to many other barriers. Financial consideration was one of them and was reported to inhibit greatly the social life of Chinese students.

Many other studies of Chinese students in other countries have also pointed to financial issues being one of the most frequently reported problems in the adaptation process. Arthur (1997) and Chen (1996) argued that financial support was important in the adaptation process and concluded that students' academic adaptation was often hampered by difficulties in their personal lives. Liang (2003) analysed the situation of Chinese students studying in the US, and reported that the most frequently reported problems by foreign students were financial problems and personal depression. Regrettably, the financial situations of mainland Chinese students living and studying in Hong Kong remain under-researched.

In Hong Kong, a non-local student needs to spend \$400,000 HKD (£30,000) on average to cover the entire tuition and living expenses for four years of study. This weighs heavily on mainland Chinese students and their families (Shives, G. 2007). However, Li's (2006) study implies that over 70% of the mainland Chinese respondents have scholarships. If that is the case, most mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong may not feel the same financial pinch as their counterparts in overseas countries.

As financial issues may weigh heavily in the experiences of mainland Chinese students living and studying outside China and have significant impacts on their experiences in the host society, it is critically important to find out whether mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong are facing similar issues. The current study will examine these students' financial stress in Hong Kong, and will ascertain whether scholarships affect their personal and academic lives.

### **2.3.3 *Perplexing Approaches to Learning and Teaching***

Approaches to learning and teaching prevalent in overseas education institutions can be very difficult for Chinese students to accept. Previous literature has suggested that the approaches to learning and teaching prevalent in China were different from those in Western societies and could be frustrating to mainland Chinese students (Taylor 1987; Ong 2006). As Hong Kong is often described as a place where "the East meets the West", it is of particular significance to find out whether mainland Chinese students perceive any differences in the approaches, and if so, what their thoughts are about this.

Hofstede (1980) and Allen (1997) believed that there was a relationship between one's preferred learning style and one's native culture. Keef (1991) described learning styles as a biological and developmental set of characteristics. Learning styles were based on characteristic cognitive, affective and physiological behaviours that serve as indicators of how learners perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment.

Over the past decades, cross-cultural comparative studies have found much evidence in support of the differences in learning approaches between Chinese and Western students. For example, Watkins and Biggs (1996) found that Chinese students tended to make great use of memorisation and repetition, while Western students tended to focus more on understanding. In a similar vein, Melton (1990) found that Chinese students preferred



Hong Kong has the function of serving as a bridge between East and West. English should be the medium of instruction to help maintain the competitiveness of Hong Kong Business. There are English and Chinese as compulsory subjects. Academics are recruited from the mainland, Taiwan, Australia, and elsewhere as well as Hong Kong.

(Poon 2003, p.1)

As such, the prevalent teaching methods may be typically Western and their research interests internationally orientated. However, there has been little empirical work done to find out what is actually happening in the field. Little research has been done in Hong Kong to investigate the cultural values of university teachers and students in the former British colony where “the East meets the West”. The current study will discuss whether mainland Chinese students perceive any differences between the learning and teaching styles in Hong Kong and in mainland China.

#### **2.3.4 “Indifferent” Teachers**

Existing cross-cultural literature suggests that one of the distinctions between mainland Chinese and Western cultures is the dependence of students on teachers (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005). To mainland Chinese students who have ventured into a foreign land for the first time, the different relationships, roles and styles between teachers and Chinese students, particularly when teachers become “indifferent”, can be distressing (Jin 1992). Therefore it is worth investigating whether mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions perceive any differences in their relationships between their teachers/tutors in Hong Kong and in mainland China, and if so how they manage the new relationships.

In Chinese terms, teacher “*laoshi*” has a special meaning other than someone who teaches. Quite often “*laoshi*” is used to describe someone who is knowledgeable and enjoys respect in general. The perception of a Chinese teacher as a friendly and warm-hearted parent is linked to the Confucian concept of “*Ren*”, which means human-heartedness or love (Mote 1993; Hall 2003). In the Chinese tradition, the relationship between teacher and student is similar to that of parent-child. In mainland China, a lecturer is not only an authority figure but also a respected elder. The information transmitted from such a respected elder

to a subordinate junior certainly is trustworthy. In Hong Kong, however, whether a lecturer is perceived as such by his/her students remains a question, although the former British colony may share a Confucian heritage with the mainland.

The relationship between the student and the teacher is considered by some researchers as part of the academic culture. Jin (1992) investigated the cultural gap in academic expectations between Chinese postgraduate students in the UK and their supervisors, and drew five conclusions: (1) there is a difference in orientation and perceptions between British and Chinese academic cultures, and this leads to an academic cultural gap between British tutors or supervisors and their Chinese students; (2) both groups have a lack of explicit awareness of their own and the others' academic culture, and see the others' academic and social behaviour in their own terms; (3) there is a lack of explicitness on the part of teachers about cultural assumptions underlying the learning process in both the UK and Chinese cultures; (4) the higher the Chinese students' competence in language without understanding the target British cultural discourse, the greater the problems; and (5) there are different expectations about relationships, roles and styles between tutors or supervisors and Chinese students (Jin 1992).

The difference in student-teacher relationships may puzzle mainland Chinese students who have newly arrived in Hong Kong. However, their perspectives in this area have been not adequately explored. In fact, studies are inadequate concerning cultural differences in relationships between overseas students and their teachers in the host countries, and the effects of these different relationships on study habits and academic achievements in general, not to mention country-specific research. This view is shared by other researchers such as Dimmock (2000), Dimmock and Walker (1998), and Cheng (1999). This is manifested in the fact that in Hofstede's (1980) cross-cultural research, education was not part of the study, but this gap was later filled by Dimmock and Walker (1998), with a particular focus on education. The current study, in an attempt to discover whether mainland Chinese students perceive any differences in the student-teacher relationships and whether the different relationships significantly impact their overall psychological well-being and their study, will provide greater vigor and vitality to the newly developed theory.

### **2.3.5 *Different Social and Cultural Environments***

Since the 1960s, cross-cultural research has identified and highlighted the impact of social and cultural differences between the home and the host cultures and societies (Elsey & Kinnel 1990). The issues become more pronounced when Chinese students go to study and live in a Western society (Cheung 1975; Leung 1996a; Leong 2006). Although Hong Kong may share a Confucian heritage with mainland China, its contemporary culture has been described by Dimmock and Walker (1998) as a blend of Western culture grafted on to a historically ingrained Chinese culture. In some cases, newly-arrived mainland Chinese students may experience shocking differences in values, beliefs, attitudes and norms while in Hong Kong (Lau & Kuan 1990; Morris & Lo 2000).

China is a Confucian society and has been regarded by cross-cultural researchers (e.g. Hofstede 1997; Dimmock & Walker 1998; Lau & Kuan 1990) as collectivist. In the mainland, the collectivist culture is prominent. In Hofstede & Hofstede's (2005) studies of 74 countries and regions, China is identified as a collectivist society. For example, family relationships are emphasized; people see themselves in terms of group membership to which they are loyal; the maintenance of harmony is accorded priority and direct confrontation is avoided. These stand in a striking contrast to the individualistic values and practices prevalent in Western societies. Unlike the mainland, Hong Kong has its special cultural characteristics and Confucianism has not been its central feature. Hong Kong's distinctive indigenous culture has, more recently, been described by some researchers as "egotistical individualism" (Lau & Kuan 1990), and an interaction of the themes of survival, affluence and deliverance (Chan 1993). These views, however, have not been strongly supported by empirical studies. The "egotistical individualism" characteristic of Hong Kong may or may not represent the consensus view of people in Hong Kong and outside, as mainland Chinese culture from time to time is also described as individualistic by some researchers (Ralston et al. 1997).

In social ethics, Lau and Kuan (1988) described the preferred option by Hong Kong people as one of "situational morality", meaning that ideas of what is right and wrong vary according to context, and are not determined by a universal set of moral beliefs. In some cases, Hong Kong people in general are seen by researchers as having an amoral, utilitarian ethos and this ethos is reflected in the Hong Kong people's attitudes towards work, politics, and the relationship between the individual and society (Wong 1993, p.21).

Thus the “amorality, materialism and a pragmatic pecuniary orientation eventually prevailed over Confucian ethics in the evolution of Hong Kong culture” (Leung 1996b, p.51). This may deviate from the moral values prevalent in most Western societies today. Mainland Chinese students, however, may or may not find these moral values in China and they might have experienced it before they came to Hong Kong.

Wong (1993) suggested that given the economic dynamism and prosperity in Hong Kong, personal pressure became a powerful motivating force compelling the individual to strive harder, as opportunities for social and economic advancement were believed to be abundant. This also explains the untiring effort of Hong Kong people to fulfil their dreams and their tolerance of long hours of work and the sacrifice of their holidays for economic gain. They value positions with high social prestige and well-paid jobs above everything else. This may explain why most people in Hong Kong are able to endure long hours of work - 44 hours per week is an required workload for university non-academic staff excluding one hour meal break per day (The University Staff Handbook 2009) and often more than 44 hours for staff of private companies. However, it is not clear whether this contradicts the work ethic prevalent in mainland China, and whether it causes difficulties among mainland students in Hong Kong.

Cultural transformation of people, namely, convergence and divergence, has become a subject of much research in the globalising world today. In regard to cultural globalisation, Bottery states that there are two opposed aspects of cultural globalisation: one of the globalisation of cultural variety and another of cultural standardisation (2006, p.11). Bottery argues that cultural influences between people from different places may be flattening variations due to globalising forces– he calls this the “cultural flattening hypothesis”:

The result (of globalisation), educationally, would seem to be that when countries are insulated, national/ethnic differences play a much larger part in determining educational contexts, and individual responses to those contexts, than when these same countries are opened up to global forces.

(Bottery 2008, p.14)

Mainland students going to Hong Kong for their higher education may be considered an example of educational globalisation. This study is interested in finding out whether cultural influences between mainland students and Hong Kong students may be flattening out due to the globalisation in the world and the increased communication between two places: the mainland and Hong Kong.

## **2.4 Research on Adaptation Strategies/Models**

How mainland Chinese students cope with, or adapt to, the difficulties that they encounter in Hong Kong is another important area of study in the current research. Adaptation, according to Boonyawiroj (1982), is a biological concept consisting of processes that facilitate the survival of a species, which emphasises the struggle of the individuals to cope with and survive within their social and physical environment. Kirschenbaum (1987) believes adaptation represents the human ability to cope successfully with the problems and demands of the environment. In the previous section, possible difficulties identified by previous researchers to be encountered by mainland Chinese students in overseas countries and in Hong Kong, were reviewed and discussed. If these difficulties do exist, it would be equally, if not more, important to find out what strategies were used to resolve them.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the abundant research conducted on difficulties encountered by Chinese students studying and living outside their home country has not been accompanied by concomitant research on adaptation/ adjustment strategies/models that they adopt to overcome the difficulties. Over the past decades, although a number of adaptation/adjustment strategies using overseas students as samples have been developed, none of them is student-specific, not to mention Chinese student-specific. However, as these generic strategies/models are relatively well-developed and widely accepted, they may, as the word “generic” suggests, help us to understand the respondents in this study. Therefore, this section will present and discuss some of these generic strategies/models. These include (1) the U-Curve Model, (2) the W-Curve Model, (3) the “Five Stages” Theory, and (4) the Cultural Accommodation Model. Finally, conclusions will be made about the lack of applicability of these models for the present study.

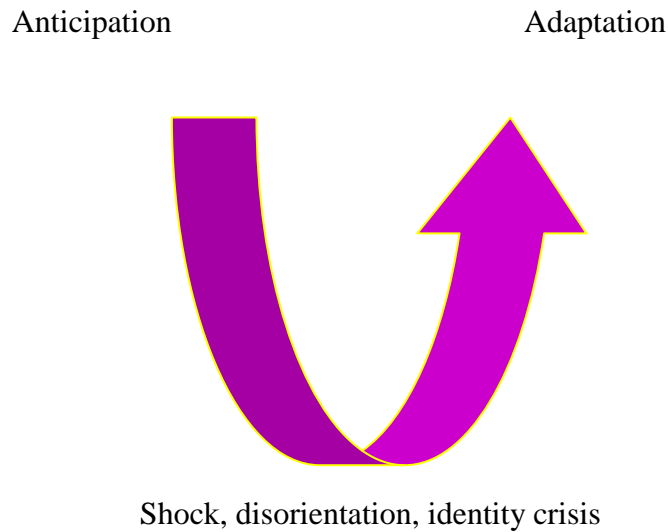


### **2.4.1     *The U-Curve Model***

The U-Curve Model, developed in the 1950s, while based on a sample of students, aims to explain the “cultural shock” phenomenon in general. It has been one of the most used approaches (Black & Mendenhall 1991; Brenner 2003; Pires et al. 2006) and may help to understand the adaptation process of the respondents in the current study.

In an attempt to analyse and explain the adjustment and adaptation process of international sojourners, Lysgaard (1955) put forward the “U-Curve” (UCT) theory when he plotted the course of adjustment of 200 Norwegian students in the US. According to this theory, adaptations or adjustments of a sojourner include four stages: “honeymoon”, “disillusionment” or “culture shock”, “adjustment” and “mastery”. In the initial stage (“honeymoon stage”), individuals are optimistic, fascinated by and excited about all the new things presented by the host culture with the interesting “sights and sounds” (Black & Mendenhall 1991). When the excitement is over, however, a period of “crisis” will follow in which they feel less well adjusted, lonely and unhappy. It is a period of disillusionment and frustration (“disillusionment” or “culture shock stage”) as he or she must seriously cope with living in the new environment on a day-to-day basis. After the second stage comes the third stage (“adjustment stage”), characterised by gradual adaptation to the new environment and learning how to interact and behave appropriately to the cultural norms of the host country, and becoming more integrated into the local community. The final stage (“mastery stage”) is marked by the ability to cope quite comfortably with the environment and progresses with small incremental increases in ability to function effectively in the new culture (see Figure 4).

### U-Curve Model Theory of Adaptation



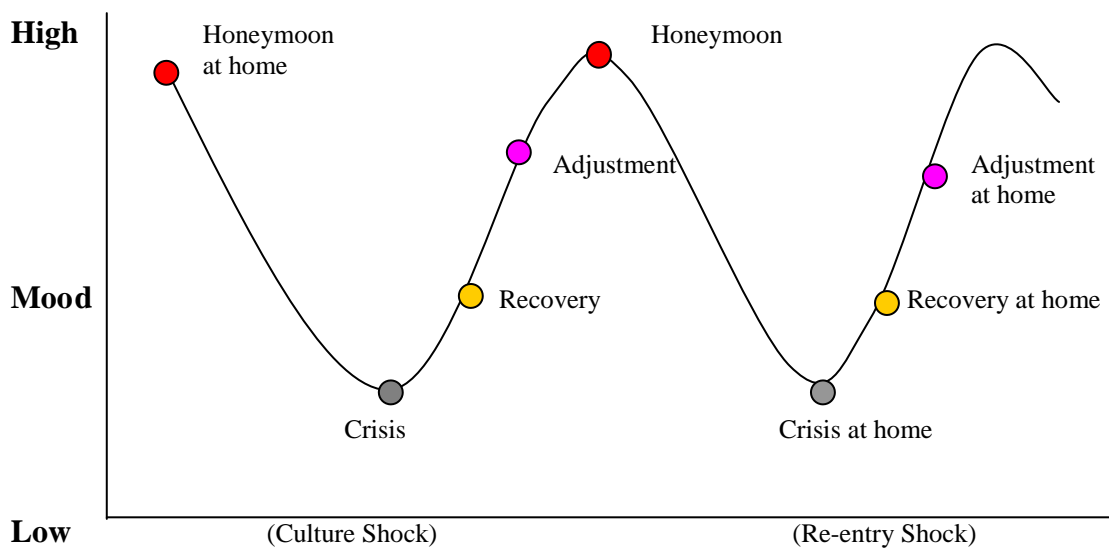
**Figure 4.** U-Curve Model of Adaptation

(Source: A Stage of adaptation, Lysgaard, 1955)

Since its inception, the U-Curve Model has been widely used to analyse and explain the adjustment and adaptation process of international sojourners in culturally different environments. However, the focus of the model is on expatriate managers, whose work and life environments are different from those of the international students, although some attempts have been made to use the framework to study international students (e.g. Chen 1994; Sun & Chen 1997). Additionally, the model suggests a systematic and natural process in which adjustment or adaptation is felt to be easy and successful from the beginning. It does not account for the dynamics of human interactions in making or breaking this systematic process. Finally, the U-Curve Model is more a description of phases of adjustment/adaptation than a theoretical framework about how and why individuals move from one stage to the next. In the current study this model will be taken into consideration in order to see whether it is applicable to mainland Chinese students in their adaptation to Hong Kong.

### 2.4.2 The W-Curve Model

The “W-Curve” Model of international sojourning is an alternative to the U-Curve Model that may help to understand the adaptation process experienced by the respondents in the current study. The model was proposed by Hart (1999) based on the Gullahorn & Gullahorn’s (1963) “W-Curve” theory. This “W-Curve” pattern describes four stages of adaptation that people experience when they come to a different cultural environment (see Figure 5 below).



**Figure 5.** The W-Curve Model (Source: Hart 1999)

Brein & David (1971) and Black & Mendenhall (1991) suggested that the W-Curve Model is an extension of the U-Curve Model. Specifically, the W-Curve is essentially an extension of the single-U-Curve to a double-U-Curve (UU Curve). Brein and David (1971) argued that the W-Curve function may be a more comprehensive description of the adjustment process for sojourners as it encompasses both the sojourner's adaptation to a foreign culture and his/her readjustment to the home culture upon return. Based on this model, the sojourner tends to experience a decline in adjustment shortly after first entering the host culture, which is followed by a recovery stage with a resultant increase in adjustment. Upon return to the home culture, however, the sojourner experiences another decrease in adjustment which will be followed by a second stage of recovery. The degree and the duration of the adjustment decline for an individual sojourner depend on a number of variables. Thus, the W-Curve Model supplements the U-Curve Model with the adjustment process that a sojourner undergoes when he/she returns home.

Similar to the U-Curve Model, the W-Curve Model was developed mainly for expatriate managers and may not be applicable to the adaptation process experienced by international students, mainland Chinese students in particular. Furthermore, this model tries to explain the systematic process of the adjustment/adaptation process but makes no attempt to understand why and how the actors experience these stages, and what impacts that different environments and human interactions have on the occurrence and the duration of the stages. Finally, the second U-Curve – the readjustment process upon return – is irrelevant to respondents in the current study if they stay or go overseas to continue their education upon graduation.

### **2.4.3    *The “Five Stages” Theory***

Another theory that may help to understand the adaptation process experienced by the respondents in the current study is the “Five Stages” theory developed by Adler, P.S. (1975): 1) contact stage, 2) disintegration stage, 3) reintegration stage, 4) autonomy stage, and 5) independence stage. Following Adler, Yoshikawa (1988) suggested that the cross-cultural adaptation process comprised a creative process covering five stages: 1) contact, 2) disintegration, 3) reintegration, 4) autonomy and 5) double-swing. Furthermore, Yoshikawa identified five patterns of perception in the double-swing stage: 1) ethnocentric perception, 2) sympathetic perception, 3) empathic perception, 4) mirror-reflect perception and 5) meta-contextual perception. Only at the last stage of cross-cultural adaptation are sojourners able to overcome culture shock through openness, sensitivity, and responsiveness towards the environment (Sun & Chen 1997).

In a sense, the “Five Stages” theory provides a conceptual model to understand adaptation/adjustment to the host culture by the sojourners in terms of perception maturity. Here the focus is on mature sojourners from developed countries during their stay in less-developed countries. The perception maturity stages may not accurately reflect the realities of the mainland Chinese students under study, who may not have acquired the level of maturity involved due to their age (All participants in this study are between 19 and 23 years old). In the current study, however, we will see whether this model is applicable to mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong in their adaptation experiences.

#### **2.4.4    *The Cultural Accommodation Model***

A more recent model, the Cultural Accommodation Model, developed by Adler, N.J. (2002) may be more helpful than previously discussed models in understanding the adaptation processes and strategies used by international sojourners from less-developed countries staying in developed countries, which most likely is the case of mainland Chinese students studying in Western countries and in Hong Kong.

The Cultural Accommodation Model emphasises that sojourners try to adopt and imitate the practices of the host culture rather than attempting to maintain the values and practices in the home country, following the maxim “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” (Adler, N.J. 2002, p.126). Accommodation to the host culture and practices can be very effective in some cases. Adler, N.J. cited having a good command of the local language of the host country as a classic example of cultural accommodation strategy. These accommodation approaches allow sojourners to continue using their normal, comfortable ways of carrying out their business or academic missions (2002, p.126).

Although the Cultural Accommodation Model has been widely acclaimed in cross-cultural studies, little empirical work has been done in the field, not to mention among mainland Chinese students staying in Hong Kong. Therefore, a good understanding is required of the key difficulties encountered by the mainland students in Hong Kong and of how the issues were resolved before the rigour of the theory can be confirmed. In addition, the success of a strategy, from the “interpretivist” point of view, can only be interpreted and constructed from the actors’ perspectives rather than be verified and testified with an assumed pattern pre-established before investigation.

#### **2.4.5    *Research on Adaptation Strategies Adopted by Chinese Students***

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, research on adaptation strategies adopted by mainland Chinese students is not widely available. Much of the existing literature in this field has been derived from studies within the confines of the generic models described earlier in this section.

In a study of adjustment for Chinese students in the USA, Chen (1994) found that there were usually three stages: (1) feelings of surprise – when Chinese students first entered the new environment, they used Chinese values to evaluate the new experience, and

always felt surprised about the cultural differences; (2) making sense - Chinese students began to make sense of unfamiliar experiences; and (3) coming to understand the host country's culture. Chen's findings coincide with the U-Curve and the Five Stages theory discussed earlier. Nevertheless, how the respondents perceived these difficulties and how the issues were resolved were not further explored.

Other studies of Chinese students studying overseas reveal that they adapt to the learning goals and expectations of the different cultures, while maintaining their high work ethic and high drive for academic achievement (Sun & Chen 1997; Tweed & Lehman 2002). In these cases, Chinese students seem to be able to distinguish and switch between memorisation for understanding and surface learning geared to examinations. They have high cognitive goals, are able to match higher level goals with compatible learning contexts, and have more extensive help seeking strategies and support systems. Again the students' perspectives and the strategies they employed were not adequately explored in these studies.

More regrettably, there has been a lack of research on the adaptation strategies/models adopted by mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong. This review shows the possible applicability of generic frameworks developed by previous researchers in analysing the adaptation process of mainland Chinese students in overseas countries, but this, by no means, confirms their applicability to mainland students in Hong Kong. It is in this area that the current study will contribute to the existing research.

## **2.5 Staying or Leaving after Graduation – Tendencies of Mainland Chinese Students in Hong Kong**

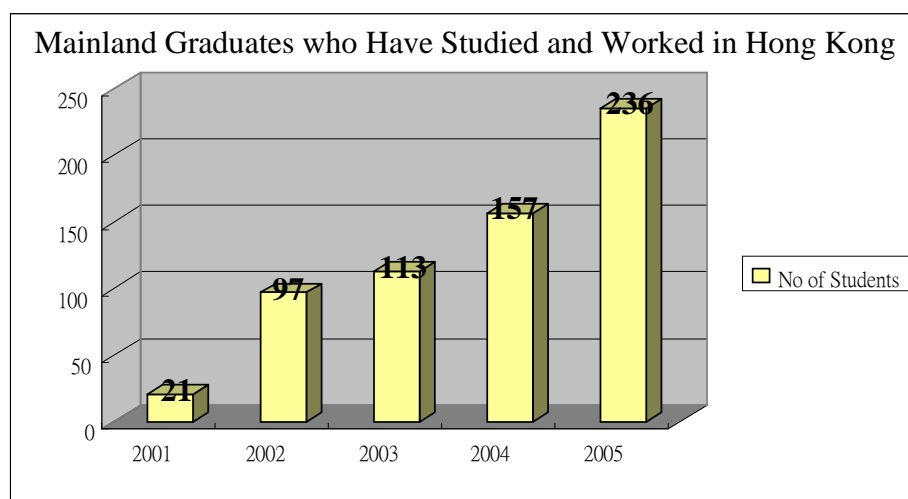
To stay or to leave Hong Kong after graduation – whatever the intentions of the majority of mainland Chinese students are, they have a great impact on the decisions to be made by the government and Higher Education Institutions in Hong Kong.

In his study of mainland Chinese students in Singapore, Ong (2006) found that the respondents' intentions to stay in, or leave Singapore, could be summarized as the "three Rs": (1) Remaining in Singapore; (2) Re-routing to another country and (3) Returning to mainland China (p.137).

The "three Rs" have been confirmed by Li and Bray (2007) in their study of mainland

Chinese students in Hong Kong and Macau. In the study, about 28% of the respondents in Hong Kong intended to re-route to overseas countries after graduation. Approximately 23% of the respondents indicated that they would return to mainland China. Surprisingly, only 2.8% of the respondents expressed interest in staying in Hong Kong, while over 45% claimed that they were undecided and would go wherever they could find better opportunities for personal development. Li and Bray (2007) argued that the career plans (i.e. staying or leaving for somewhere else after graduation) that the respondents had in mind constituted one of the distinctive characteristics of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong, as compared with their counterparts in mainland China and in overseas countries (p.17).

However, the trends identified in Li and Bray's (2007) research are not consistent with those documented by the official publications of Hong Kong universities and with the general perception. For example, the Annual Report of the University (2006) shows that 90% of the mainland students intended to stay in Hong Kong either to pursue a higher degree or to seek employment (See figure 6 for details). In 2007, a total of 792 mainland students have completed their academic pursuits in the University's mainland outposts. Lam (2006) also reported that among mainland students in Hong Kong, most stayed in Hong Kong after their graduation.



**Figure 6.** Mainland Chinese Graduates in Hong Kong

(Source: Hong Kong Association of Mainland Graduates, SCMP August 5, 2006)

In Hong Kong, the popular view also tends to believe that the majority of mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong will stay rather than leave, as represented by James Yetman, a lecturer in Hong Kong University, who discussed the issue on the Hong Kong Macro (Google Blog in April 30, 2007). Yetman argued that, in recent years, the number of mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong has skyrocketed, especially in business-related disciplines. The main reasons why mainland Chinese students come to study in Hong Kong include: 1) some students want to work in Hong Kong after they graduate; 2) some students may come to Hong Kong as a way to obtain a visa and have little intention of actually studying, but instead intend to work or search for a job; and 3) some students may expect to gain a “better” education in Hong Kong (Yetman 2007).

The conflicting reports and comments in the existing research literature and in the mass media are confusing rather than clarifying. Even if the argument is true that the majority of the mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong do intend to stay in Hong Kong after graduation for a higher degree or for employment, questions remain as to what attracts them to stay vis-à-vis going overseas or returning to mainland China for work and study. There is also the issue of why they are not discouraged by the fact that only a small portion of mainland Chinese students have successfully remained due to the fierce competition in the job market (*South China Morning Post*, April 30, 2007). The current study will also look into the plans of mainland Chinese students regarding their future after their graduation and what kind of expectations they have in terms of career development.

## **2.6 Summary**

Centered around the four Research Questions (RQs), this chapter reviewed and discussed some of the key research findings presented by previous researchers on the perspectives of mainland Chinese students in overseas countries and in Hong Kong to establish a context within which the current study and its possible contribution to the current research literature can be better understood.

To summarise, this chapter discussed the reasons why mainland Chinese opt to study overseas and why they choose Hong Kong in particular to further their study (RQ1). The key findings by previous researchers on difficulties encountered by overseas students, mainland Chinese students in particular, were represented and discussed. Where available, research findings specific to mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong were reviewed and



discussed in relation to RQ2. These difficulties mainly occurred in six dimensions at three levels: language hurdles and financial stress occurred at the *individual level*; perplexing approaches to learning and teaching and “indifferent” teachers occurred at the *institutional and classroom level*; and different social and cultural environment, discrimination and racial prejudice occurred at the *societal level*. Among them, language hurdles appeared to be the biggest obstacle for mainland Chinese students studying overseas.

The challenges encountered by overseas students while studying in a foreign country have been a subject of considerable research over the past decades. Many issues confronting the students, including those from mainland China, have been identified and well documented. However, whether these difficulties have been overcome and how they were overcome have not been adequately addressed and documented. In the existing literature, some generic adaptation/adjustment models seem to be well received by the research community, but few, if any of them, seem to be Chinese student-specific, not to mention the ones focused specifically on mainland students in Hong Kong. In the case of Hong Kong, the inflow of mainland Chinese students is a relatively new phenomenon starting in 1999. Fertile soil remains for study to be conducted in order to understand the perspectives of the actors on the difficulties that they encountered in this particular part of China, on how they addressed the issues (RQ3), and on how they plan for their future after graduation (RQ4). A good understanding of these perspectives, which is the main objective of the current project, will make a substantial contribution to the existing literature, to the policy-making by the government and Higher Education Institutions, and will be conducive to practical resolution of the issues under investigation confronting mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong.

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of this research project is to find out the reasons why mainland Chinese students choose Hong Kong for their higher education understand and explain the experiences of mainland Chinese students as they adjust to studying in a different organisational and societal cultural context and as they plan their futures after graduation.

In Chapter 1, the background to the current study and the research questions were presented. In Chapter 2, the relevant literature was reviewed, based on the following four Research Questions (RQs):

- (RQ1)** Why do mainland Chinese students choose Hong Kong for their higher education?
- (RQ2)** What experiences do mainland Chinese students have while living and studying in Hong Kong?
- (RQ3)** How do mainland Chinese students adapt to living and studying in Hong Kong?
- (RQ4)** What future plans, if any, do the mainland Chinese students have after graduation in Hong Kong?

This chapter focuses on the research methods adopted in addressing the research questions. Section 3.2 illustrates how the research questions utilise an interpretivist paradigm by setting out the differences between interpretivism and positivism, and justifies the reasons why this study employs an interpretivist paradigm. Section 3.3 introduces and justifies the use of case study methodology as a research approach in this study, and section 3.4 presents the sampling method including how the sample was determined and how the participants were selected. Section 3.5 illustrates the methods of data collection. The interview was used as the main data collection method. This section also discusses the design of the interview schedules in relation to the research questions, the participants and sampling rationale, practicalities and steps taken to ensure interviews ran smoothly, and explains how the interviews were conducted. Section 3.6 describes the

data analysis including coding, categorising and memoing. Section 3.7 discusses issues of validity/reliability and trustworthiness, which ensure that the quality and rigour of the research were maintained. This study has limited capacity for generalisability as discussed in Section 3.8. Section 3.9 indicates the researcher's positioning in respect to the study. Section 3.10 focuses on ethical considerations and illustrates how ethical standards were achieved during the research.

## **3.2 Educational Research and Paradigmatic Choice: Adopting Interpretivism**

Educational research is described as “the systematic, empirical and critical inquiry into matters which directly or indirectly concern the learning and teaching of children and adults” (Powney & Watts 1987, p.3). Mortimore (2000) shares this definition of educational research and adds four main tasks of educational research: observing and recording systematically; analysing and drawing out implications; publishing findings; and attempting to improve educational processes and outcomes. He sums up the task of educational research by arguing that its chief purpose is to replace anecdote with evidence when making the case for changes in educational policy and practice (Mortimore 2000, p.5). However, a diversity of views exists as to how this might be approached. There is no consensus as to what constitutes “evidence” in educational research and researchers' perspectives on these issues are shaped by their epistemological and ontological positions. These “positions” can be said to represent research paradigms – over-arching philosophical approaches to educational research. It is possible to identify a number of different paradigms within educational research (Punch, K. 2005), although it is common to pose the fundamental differences between positivism and interpretivism (Punch, K. 2005; Creswell, J.W. 2007; Gall, Gall & Borg 2003; Cohen et al. 2000; Miles & Huberman 1994). In the following section I explore the debate between positivism and interpretivism and justify locating my own research within the interpretivist paradigm.

### ***3.2.1 Positivism and Interpretivism***

Positivism accepts the natural sciences as the paradigm of human knowledge. Positivists believe that the methodological procedures of natural science may be directly applied to the social sciences (Punch, K. 2005; Cohen, P.S. 1980). This implies a particular stance

concerning the social scientist as an observer of social reality, and the end-product of investigations by social scientists can be formulated in terms parallel to those of natural science. Their analyses are often expressed in laws or law-like generalisations that have been established in relation to natural phenomena. Positivism involves a view of social scientists as analysts or interpreters of their subject matter, and claims that science provides the clearest possible ideal of knowledge (Cohen et al. 2000, p.8). It also adopts a deductive method of reasoning in which theories are presented in the forms of hypotheses, and these are then tested using relevant statistical techniques. Emphasis within this tradition is on the use of research methods that can be proven to be valid and reliable, and that are capable of producing generalisable results.

The disadvantage of the positivist approach is in “its application to the study of human behaviour where the immense complexity of human nature and the elusive and intangible quality of social phenomena contrast strikingly with the order and regularity of the natural world” (Cohen et al. 2000, p.9). In short, some scholars (Creswell, J.W. 2007; Bogdan & Biklen 2003; Cohen et al. 2000; Wicks, A.C. & Freeman, R.E. 1998; Punch, K. 2005) suggest that positivist approaches struggle to convey the complexity that is the reality of educational organisations. Human behaviour simply does not fit into neat laws and rules. The idea that scientific relationships can be generated and produce “cause-and-effect” laws is too simplistic. Positivism is first of all a concept of measurement: “In my language, positivism means measurement” (Abbott 2001, p.65).

In contrast, the interpretivist paradigm is less concerned with identifying realities and laws, and more with trying to explain the complexity of the social world. It does not necessarily accept that there is “a reality” – but rather that there are multiple realities, or multiple perspectives of what reality is, dependent on the subjective sense making of experiences and situations by individuals. Individuals make sense of their world in different ways, such that people may see and experience the same things, but may interpret and make sense of them differently (Merriam 1998). How individuals interpret the world around them, and how the phenomena are researched depend on a complex range of factors including various psychological factors, but also people’s life history, experiences and contexts: “reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social world” (Merriam 1998, p.6). According to this view it is the role of the educational researcher to interpret these different perceptions of reality and to make sense

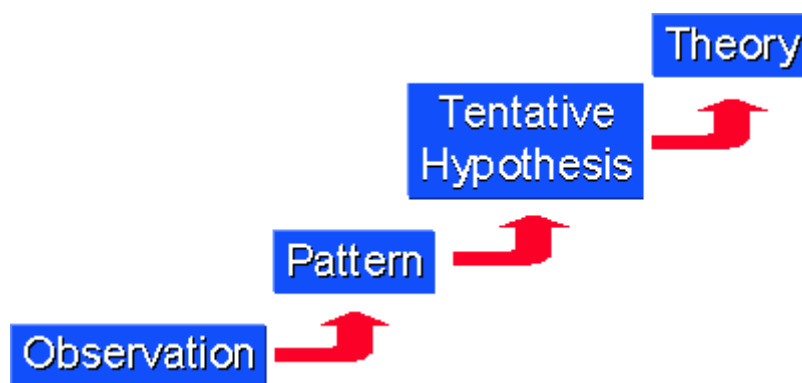
of them. The interpretivist researcher seeks to make meaning from the diverse perspectives that emerge from the research process.

Some interpretivists (Cohen & Levinthal 1990; Dovenport et al. 1998) proposed the cognitive perspective that was intimately attached to the knower, an individual who held knowledge. Spender (1996) separated individual knowledge and collective knowledge in his taxonomy by indicating that collective knowledge was embedded into artefacts, culture and identity, and routines. Some scholars (Brown & Duguid 2001; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998) argued that knowledge was created and held collectively and people could learn and create knowledge through continuous social interactions (Nonaka & Peltokorpi 2006). The form of reasoning adopted by interpretivist researchers is not deductive (as in positivism), but inductive:

Inductive reasoning, by its very nature, is more open-ended and exploratory, especially at the beginning. Deductive reasoning is narrower in nature and is concerned with testing or confirming hypotheses. Most social research involves both inductive and deductive reasoning processes at some time in the project even though a particular study may look like it's purely deductive or inductive.

(Trochim 2006, p.1)

The following Figure 7 describes how the inductive reasoning works:



**Figure 7.** The Inductive Reasoning Plan

(Source: Trochim 2006, Web Centre for Social Science Methods.)

Inductive reasoning works from specific observations to broader generalisations and theories. Inductive reasoning begins with specific observations and measures, then tries to detect patterns and regularities, formulates some tentative hypotheses that can be explored, and finally ends up developing some more general conclusions or theories, although these may be on a limited scale, especially in the social sciences.

Furthermore, within interpretivist research there is recognition that the researcher is not remote and detached from the research process, but instead is part of the research. There is an acknowledgement that the researcher has a perspective of his/her own, and that he/she may also have an impact on the data. This is particularly the case when the researcher is examining an area close to his/her own personal context (Flick, 2002).

The disadvantages of the interpretive paradigm exist mainly in the perceived relativism of this type of research. Cohen et al. (2000) indicate that just as positivistic theories can be criticised for their macro-sociological persuasion, interpretive theories and methods can be criticised for their narrowly micro-sociological persuasion. Moreover, interpretivists are criticised (Mays & Pope 1995; Kirk & Miller 1986) for a lack of objectivity in their approach to research. Methods of data collection and analysis associated with interpretivism are considered too subjective and therefore lacking in rigour. These are important issues and I will respond to these critiques later in this chapter.

### ***3.2.2 Locating the Study in the Interpretivist Paradigm – a Justification***

The current research topic relates to identifying: 1) reasons why mainland Chinese students choose Hong Kong for their higher education study (RQ1); 2) difficulties that mainland Chinese students experience when they arrive to study in Hong Kong (RQ2); and 3) the range of their adaptation strategies to cope with the new environment and to ensure their academic success (RQ3). The study also aims to study the longer-term plans of mainland Chinese students after graduation from Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions (RQ4). The overall objectives of the study are to better understand how mainland students themselves describe and make sense of their own experience of studying in Hong Kong. As such it is important that I adopt an approach that allows mainland students a “voice” in the research. My aim is to hear from students’ perspectives and to explore the mainland students’ experiences regarding the phenomenon of cultural and personal adjustment they make when leaving their homeland and living and studying

in Hong Kong. It is not my aim to try to establish statistically reliable relationships to explain what I am researching. I am not looking for scientific explanations or testable hypotheses, but rather I am looking for “thick descriptions” of students’ experiences, as presented by students themselves. It is my role as the researcher to make sense of these accounts from students. I am not looking to test theory or to generate a theory. This locates my study within the interpretivist paradigm.

### **3.3 Research Approach – Case Study**

The researcher concurs with Coleman and Briggs (2007) who argue that it is imperative to develop a research design that is consistent with the overall paradigm and related research questions. Nisbet and Watt (1984) defined the case study as designed to illustrate a more general principle:

The single instance is of a bounded system, for example a child, a class, a school or a community. It provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles. Indeed a case study can enable readers to understand how ideas and abstract principles can get together.

(Nisbet and Watt 1984, p.72)

The research makes use of the case study approach and in the following section I shall discuss the use of case studies in educational research and justify my use of it.

#### **3.3.1 *Strengths of Case Study***

The key feature of a case study is that it has a boundary – described by Merriam (1998) as a “bounded system” (p.27). It is particularly well-suited to those situations in which the phenomenon being researched involves complex relationships and there is little or no previous research that has yielded understandings, propositions or theories (Bassey 1999). The aim is to learn about a particular individual, institution, programme or event. The purpose is not necessarily to identify the “typical”, but may be to learn about an outlier or atypical person, institution, event or programme that does not fit the general trend. Trochim (2006) identifies a number of different types of case study according to the

overall intent of the study. First is a “descriptive case study” that seeks to present a detailed account of the phenomenon under study. Second is an “interpretative case study” which contains rich, thick descriptions and are used to develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering. Third are “evaluative case studies”, involving description, explanation and judgment. According to Yin (1994), the case study is a particularly good means of educational evaluation because of its ability to explain the causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies. Fourth, and finally, “pilot case studies” are a final preparation of data collection. These can help investigators to refine their data collection plans with respect to both the content of the data and the procedures to be followed (Yin 1994).

One of the strengths of using case studies is that they can be used to observe effects in real contexts. They recognise that context is a powerful determinant of both cause and effect. As Nisbet and Watt (1984) remark, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Sturman (1999) argues that:

A distinguishing feature of case studies is that human systems have a wholeness or integrity to them rather than being a loose connection of traits. Furthermore, contexts are unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report the complex, dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in unique instances.

(Sturman 1999, p103)

This makes case study research particularly appropriate for developing or building theory, rather than testing theory.

A disadvantage of the case study approach is that the researcher needs to exercise caution regarding any claims to generalisability. Case study research does not seek to generalise based on statistical notions of validity, but instead it aims to offer detailed understanding from which theory might be developed. It is important therefore to be clear about what a case study aims to do, and what it does not claim to do. Guba and Lincoln (1981) also warn against oversimplifying or exaggerating from a case study, and therefore drawing inaccurate conclusions. It is also important to be aware of the difficulty of hiding the identity of the case, for example, the person or institution being studied, and this can



produce ethical problems. This can occur when the researcher is closely related to the case. These issues are discussed later in this chapter.

### **3.3.2 *Justifying the Case Study Approach in this Study***

The aims of this research project require a great amount of detailed description of mainland Chinese students in a Hong Kong environment. It is based on capturing the voice of students about their experiences. Instead of using numerical analysis, theory will be developed through description, typologies, models and diagrams-relationships between categories and concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Developing theory based on thick descriptions generated from the data, makes the in-depth, detailed case study the most appropriate research approach to explore my research questions (Miles & Huberman 1994).

## **3.4 Sampling Methods and Sample Selection**

An important aspect of case study research is the selection of the case, and this is largely determined by the research aims of the project. Cases are usually selected by purposive sampling, which is the selection of cases that are likely to be information-rich with specific respect to the purpose of the research (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Random sampling is inappropriate, as the purpose is not to make claims of generalisability from the sample to the wider population. In some cases the sample may be decided at the same time as data collection and analysis. For example, particular or specific new cases may be chosen depending on previous rounds of data collection and analysis. In this type of sampling the researcher does not know before the research is underway how the phenomenon being studied varies across cases, what the key criteria are and how many to sample (Lincoln & Guba 1985).

From the list shown in mainland Chinese students of full-time Undergraduate programmes in 2007-2008 in the University (Appendix 1), it is clear that Business-related subjects attract most mainland Chinese students: Accountancy and Finance which had 242 mainland Chinese students was the top for popularity, followed by Electric and Information Engineering with 81 mainland Chinese students. Departments of Logistics (77 mainland students) and Marketing and Management (57 mainland students), which were also part of Faculty of Business, were counted as the third and fourth most popular

among mainland students. Ironically, the Department of Chinese, which only received 1 mainland Chinese student, had the lowest intake of mainland students. The total number of mainland Chinese students was counted as 8% of the total yearly intake of the University in 2007-2008 and this percentage should grow to 15% of the total yearly intake in the next two years according to Hong Kong University Grant Council Policy in 2008. The pattern of mainland student enrolment at the University was fairly typical of other Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions and was consistent with a policy of increasing mainland students in Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions described in the opening chapter.

### **3.4.1 Sampling Methods**

A key problem of design is to select the cases for interviewing. For the purpose of the pilot interviews (detailed later) *opportunistic sampling* was adopted. This involved the selection of interviewees on the basis of the researcher's familiarity with them and thus the ease of access. Normally, this is not a satisfactory method of sampling, as it compromises both the reliability and the validity of the research. However, for the purpose of the pilot I took the view that an opportunity sample was expedient and acceptable. For the substantive research a combination of *Maximum Variation Sampling* and *Snowball Sampling* as defined by Gall, Gall & Borg (2003) was used as this required a more rigorous and robust sampling approach. *Maximum Variation Sampling* aimed to gain the range of variation in the phenomenon in the particular university. The purpose of this strategy was "to document the range of variation in the study and to determine whether common themes, patterns and outcomes cut across this variation" (Gall, Gall & Borg 2003, p.179). The *Snowball Sampling* technique allowed the researcher to ask well-situated people to recommend cases to study. In this case the researcher used the *Snowball Sampling* method by having names of potential interviewees referred by the Putonghua Club in the Department of Chinese and Bilingual Studies, Putonghua teachers in the Department, and by asking the first group of interviewees to recommend further cases to study. As the process continued, the researcher discovered well-situated people and an increasing number of recommended cases that were included in the sample (Gall, Gall & Borg 2003).

### 3.4.2 *Pilot Interviews*

Pilot interviews were conducted with **four** different participants in January 2006. The Pilot Interview Schedule (Appendix 2) was designed around the broad area of my proposed thesis topic as was emerging from my review of the literature. The pilot schedule was designed following the drafting of my research questions. The purpose of the pilot was threefold: 1) to ensure that the questions generated the correct data relative to my research questions; 2) to ensure that the questions were appropriate – that is, they were understood by interviewees; and 3) to confirm that my draft research questions were “researchable”, that is that the data generated would produce a worthwhile study.

Four students who were selected for the pilot interview were all first year students from different departments of Logistics, Electronic and Information Engineering, Biology and Electrical Engineering. They came from different provinces of China, and they were all native Putonghua speakers (although with their own dialects). Students were deliberately chosen from classes that the researcher did not teach in order to avoid the ethical issues relating to power relationships between interviewers and interviewees.

The pilot interviews were in two parts – the substantive interview, and then a supplementary interview that was an “interview about the interview” or a Post Pilot Interview Evaluation. This Post Pilot Interview Evaluation (Appendix 3) gave me a general framework to assess: 1) whether the length of each interview was appropriate; 2) whether they felt it was difficult to understand and answer the interview questions; 3) whether English or Putonghua would be more suitable for interviewees to use in expressing themselves; 4) whether extra topics emerged which did not show on the interview schedule; and 5) whether interviewees had any feelings about the interview process.

In practical terms the interviews appeared to be highly successful. Only small numbers of interviewees were involved and therefore it was possible to ensure arrangements ran smoothly. The Post Pilot Interview Evaluation revealed some minor problems with specific interview questions, and from this evaluation some adjustments were suggested: 1) the interview time of one hour seemed too short, and in fact each interview took about one and half hour to two hours, and all pilot interviewees indicated that they needed more time to discuss about some issues during the interview; 2) regarding the interview

language, the research was not aware which language students would prefer since the Interview Schedule was written in English and the research would be written in English, but through the Evaluation of Pilot Interview it was clear that students had all indicated they wished to be interviewed in their native language, Putonghua, and this also appeared to work well in the main interviews.

There were more research topics generated that were not included in the pilot interview schedule such as a) their plans after graduation, b) integration of mainland Chinese students into Hong Kong and Hong Kong institutions, and c) the dominance of the language acquisition issue. The issue of the plan after graduation emerged very strongly, which I had not accounted for, and was added as the Research Question (RQ4) of this study: "What future plans, if any, do mainland Chinese students have after graduation in Hong Kong"? The issues of integration and language were covered in other Research Questions: RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3, and became a major part of the main interview schedule. Some other issues related to cultural aspects in general, such as racist attitudes towards people from the mainland in wider Hong Kong society, became less conspicuous. This was not identified as an issue by students in interviews, even when this issue was raised through the use of probe questioning. However, it was difficult to establish whether this meant that racism was not an issue for mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong, or whether these students did not have the confidence to raise this issue. Therefore this issue did not take an important part in the main interview schedule but was included in the general questions in the last part of the interview schedule.

### **3.4.3     *Sampling for the Main Study***

For the main study, nineteen students were interviewed and the details of participants are provided in section 3.5.1, Profiles of Participants, and also in chapter 4 and in Appendix 4. For sampling in the main study, two mainland students were identified from the list of members of the University Putonghua Club. Mainland students could be identified by the spelling of their names in Hanyu Pinyin which is the phonetic system used in mainland China, while Hong Kong has adopted a different system of spelling for surnames in alphabets. For example, the surnames "Li", "Xie", and "Zhang" in mainland China are spelled "Lee", "Tse" and "Cheung" in Hong Kong. The first two students were then interviewed and asked to recommend other mainland students at the University on the

basis that they should have a different experience studying and living in Hong Kong to those I had already interviewed. My aim was to deliberately look to identify the range of experiences from students who were studying in different departments and who came from different areas of China. The original mother tongues/dialects of these students were different, such as students from Beijing, Shanghai, Sichuan, Canton and many other provinces, had varying dialects of Putonghua, Shanghai and Sichuan Dialects, Cantonese and so on.

China is a vast country, and the lifestyle habits can vary greatly from South to North, and from East to West. People from northern China for example tend not to like hot and humid weather which is the typical climate of Hong Kong. People from southern China such as Canton Province can adjust more easily to the living style and the language of Hong Kong. People from the central and western provinces of China, such as Sichuan and Hunan, like hot and spicy food which is not the typical food of Hong Kong; and people from eastern China such as Shanghai like sweet food and dislike hot and spicy food. The researcher was keen to find out whether the adaptive strategies of these students were different when they came to Hong Kong.

At the start of data collection the sample size was unknown. I adopted the approach of "theoretical saturation" (Strauss and Corbin 1990) whereby I undertook interviews until no new data was emerging. The aim was to identify the range of responses, and when I believed this range had been secured I ceased to interview any more respondents (Gall, Gall & Borg 2003, pp.178-182).

### **3.5 Data Collection Methods - Interviews**

The main data collection method used in this research was semi-structured interviews. The current researcher, as stated, conducted individual face-to-face interviews with nineteen students from the University. Each interview lasted one and half to two hours. Semi-structured interviews involve a question checklist that is not rigorously adhered to in terms of sequence, thus allowing the participants considerable latitude in responses (Johnson 1994). Often there is an initial question followed by probes. The schedule may contain spaces for the interviewer to record notes or the interview may be taped. A semi-structured interview schedule tends to be the one most favoured by educational

researchers as it allows respondents to express themselves at length, but offers enough shape to prevent aimless rambling (Johnson 1994, p.44).

My intention was to use semi-structured interviews based on the following characteristics defined by Drever (1995). Semi-structured interviews have the following characteristics: they are formal encounters on a subject agreed upon between researcher and participants; the main questions set by the interviewer create the overall structure; prompts and probes fill in the structure; the interviewee has a fair degree of freedom about what to talk about, how much to say, and how to express it; and the interviewer can assert control when necessary (Drever 1995, p11).

There are strengths and weaknesses in using interviews (Punch, K. 2005; Creswell, J.W. 2007; Gall, Gall & Borg 2003; Cohen et al. 2000; Miles & Huberman 1994). As indicated by Cohen et al. (2000) the advantages of research interviews are that they may be used as the principal means of gathering information having direct bearing on the research objectives; they may be used to test hypotheses or to suggest new ones or as an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationships; and interviews may be used in conjunction with other methods (Cohen et al. 2000, p.268).

Interviews are arguably the most common form of qualitative data gathering. Using interviews as a research method has its advantages and disadvantages (Gall, Gall & Borg 2003; Punch, K. 2005, Creswell, J.W. 2007). In light of the advantages, Gillham (2000) suggests that face-to-face interviews are appropriate only when small numbers of people are involved; people are accessible; most of the questions are "open" and require an extended response and depth of meaning is central, and with only some approximation to typicality. The purpose of the current study is to obtain "thick description" in great detail and consider the phenomenon in its context with a holistic perspective. The aim is to develop a model or generate a theory. Therefore interviews were considered the most suitable method to secure this aim and answer the research questions (Gillham 2000).

The disadvantages of face-to-face interviews are also visible under the following circumstances: large numbers of people may need to be involved and people can be widely dispersed, in these circumstances ensuring consistency can be difficult to achieve (Oppenheim 1992, p.65). Face-to-face interviews are very time consuming, it takes many hours to conduct interviews, especially when there is a large number of interviewees, and

it takes a great deal of time writing down the scripts. Finding an appropriate place is also a problem in conducting face-to-face interviews; some places may not be good for talking about sensitive matters and other places may be too noisy to have a serious talk.

### **3.5.1      *Profiles of Participants***

The main study was based largely on interviews with a sample of **nineteen** mainland Chinese students who were studying in various departments of the University. The participants were divided into three groups. **Group I** consisted of **seven** undergraduate students who had come to study at the University less than a year, as they had taken their Foundation Year in China. **Group II** was made up of **eight** students who had been attending the University for more than a year, as they had taken their Foundation Year in Hong Kong. A comparison of the two groups may show the ways in which students adapt to living and studying in the Hong Kong environment over time. **Group III** was made up of **four** students in a later stage to give more information to Research Questions 1 and 4 only as the information sought before was not sufficient to give in-depth and thick description on these two Research Questions. The nineteen participants were labelled with the codes shown in Table 4, 5 and 6:

**Table 4. Profiles of Participants in Group I**

Information and Background of Interviewees						
GROUP I						
(Participants were in Hong Kong for less than a year)						
Code	Age	Gender	Dept	Original city / Province	Family Background	Scholarship/ Self-financed
I-ST1	21	M	Electric and Information Engineering	Guangzhou	Father: Cadre  Mother: Teacher	Self-financed
I-ST2	21	M	Logistics	Zhejiang Province	Father: Businessman  Mother: Unemployed	Self-financed
I-ST3	21	F	Biology	Beijing	Father: Cadre  Mother: Self-employed	Self-financed
I-ST4	21	F	Biology	Jiangsu Province	Father: Unemployed  Mother: Unemployed	Self-financed
I-ST5	21	M	Marketing	Jiangsu Province	Father: Unknown  Mother: Unknown	Scholarship
I-ST6	20	F	Finance	Zhejiang Province	Father: Self-employed  Mother: Self-employed	Self-financed
I-ST7	23	M	Math	Jiangxi Province	Father: Teacher  Mother: Accountant	Self-financed



**Table 5. Profiles of Participants in Group II**

<b>GROUP II</b>						
<b>(Participants have been in Hong Kong for more than a year)</b>						
<b>Code</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Dept</b>	<b>Original city / Province</b>	<b>Family Background</b>	<b>Scholarship/ Self-financed</b>
II-ST1	21	F	Logistics	Beijing	Father: Cadre  Mother: Doctor	Self-Financed
II-ST2	20	F	Biology	Guangzhou  Guangdong Province	Father: Cadre  Mother: Architect	Self-financed
II-ST3	20	M	Business	Shanghai	Father: Unknown  Mother: Unknown	Scholarship
II-ST4	19	M	Building and Real Estate	Guangdong Province	Father: Self-employed  Mother: Self-employed	Self-financed
II-ST5	19	F	Electrical Engineering	Sichuan Province	Father: Researcher  Mother: Engineer	Self-financed
II-ST6	21	M	Marketing	Shanghai	Father: Unknown  Mother: Unemployed	Self-financed
II-ST7	21	F	Accounting	Jiangsu Province	Father: Cadre  Mother: Nurse	Self-financed
II-ST8	20	F	Logistics	Zhejiang Province	Father: Teacher  Mother: Teacher	Self-financed

**Table 6. Profiles of Participants in Group III**

<b>GROUP III</b>						
<b>(for Research Questions 1 and 4 only)</b>						
<b>Code</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Dept</b>	<b>Original city / Province</b>	<b>Family Background</b>	<b>Scholarship/ Self-financed</b>
III-ST1	21	F	Finance & Accounting	Nanjing, Jiangsu Province	Father: Cadre Mother: Accountant	Self-Financed
III-ST2	20	F	Logistics	Jilin Province	Father: Businessman working in Hong Kong Mother: Cadre	Self-financed
III-ST3	20	F	Logistics	Zhejiang Province	Father: Cadre Mother: Cadre	Self-financed
III-ST4	20	F	Logistics	Guangdong Province	Father: Cadre Mother: Cadre	Self-financed

Table 4, 5 and 6 are divided into seven columns: codes, age, sex, department of study, original city/province, family financial background and financial support. Because the interviewees' backgrounds and experiences were different, their feelings about going to a new cultural environment and their adaptation strategies may also have been different. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 23 and studied in eight different departments. As noted in Section 3.4, they came from different provinces and cities in China: four of the participants (I-ST1, II-ST2, II-ST4 and III-ST4) came from Guangdong Province and were fluent in Cantonese; four (I-ST3, II-ST1, II-ST8 and III-ST2) came from Beijing or northern China; and eleven (I-ST2, I-ST4, I-ST5, I-ST6, I-ST7, II-ST3, II-ST5, II-ST6, II-ST7, III-ST1, and III-ST3) came from southern China, two from Shanghai and nine from the provinces of Sichuan, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Hunan and Jiangxi. With regard to their source of financial support, three of the participants (I-ST4, I-ST5 and II-ST3) were on scholarships, and sixteen were studying on a self-financed basis. All seven of the

students in Group I had taken their Foundation Year at a mainland university, such as Zhejiang University and Shanghai Jiaotong University, whereas all eight of those in Group II and four of Group III had done the Foundation Year in Hong Kong at the University. In the interviews, the participants expressed different feelings about and different strategies for settling into the new cultural and educational environment of Hong Kong. These differences depended on many factors, such as 1) their places of origin, 2) their schools and departments, 3) the type of financial support they received, and 4) the length of time they had been in Hong Kong. More detailed descriptions of the participants are provided in Chapter 4.

### ***3.5.2 Design of the Interview Schedule Related to the Research Questions***

All of the interviews were semi-structured and based on a framework of questions that were related to the research questions. The schedules (Appendices 5 and 6) provided a core of common questions that all interviewees were asked, whilst supplementary questions were asked depending on the responses. It was important to prepare a schedule for a number of reasons. According to Cohen et al. (2000), a schedule serves as a useful guide to the interview, provides a significant part of the research evidence and helps to ensure that the interviewer does not run out of or miss any questions (p. 275). A schedule, which should include the main questions and possible prompts and probes, also guarantees the consistency of treatment across interviews. The research questions of the current study informed the interview questions, and these were confirmed following a pilot interview. The questions in an interview schedule should be carefully and logically sequenced, so that they “flow” naturally. As a general rule, more general questions should come first (Cohen et al. 2000, pp. 276-279).

The interview schedule (see Table 7 for the design) was divided into five parts and began with general warm-up questions to provide a suitable introduction and put the interviewees at ease. The purpose of these questions was to find out general information about the respondents, including their cultural, financial and family background and the schools/departments in which they were studying. The subsequent questions adhered closely to the four research questions. Hence, the second part of the interview was designed to elicit information about why mainland Chinese students choose Hong Kong

for higher education (RQ1). The third part sought information about such students' experiences of living and studying in Hong Kong (RQ2), as well as the strategies they adopt to adjust to the new cultural environment. The fourth part of the interview, which focused on RQ3, aimed to identify the perceptions of mainland Chinese students about how the university accommodated their needs and whether it offered them sufficient support. Finally, the questions in the fifth part addressed how these students had integrated into Hong Kong society and what plans they had for after graduation (RQ4). A copy of Interview Schedule 1 and Interview Schedule 2 are attached as Appendix 5 and Appendix 6. Interview Schedule 1 was used to generate the first time information with Group I and Group II, and Interview Schedule 2 was used to generate more information regarding Research Questions 1 and 4 with Group III only at a later stage. The way in which the questions were answered and categorised is illustrated in Section 3.6 of this chapter.

**Table 7. Design of Interview Schedule Related to the Research Questions**

Design of Interview Schedule Related to Research Questions		
Item	Interview Question	Target and Purpose
Part I, Question 1	<i>Please tell me a little about your background. First of all, please tell me about your life in mainland China. Where do you come from? What do your parents do? What did you study at school?</i>	Warm-Up Questions as an Introduction:  To put the interviewees at ease  To find out general information about their cultural, financial and family backgrounds and the schools and departments in which they study.
Part II, Questions 1 and 2	<i>Why did you decide to come to Hong Kong? How long have you been at this University? Why did you decide to attend this University?</i>	Target Research Question 1:  To find out why mainland Chinese students choose Hong Kong for higher education? Why did they choose this university?
Part III, Question 1	<i>Would you tell me what your experiences of living and studying in Hong Kong have been like? Have they been what you expected or different? If they have been different, then how so?</i>	Target Research Question 2 (part I):  To discover the experiences of mainland Chinese students with regard to living and studying in Hong Kong.

Part III, Question 2	<i>As a student from mainland China, what would you say are the key differences, if any, between studying in the mainland and studying in Hong Kong?</i>	Target Research Question 2 (part II)  To see whether there are any differences for mainland Chinese students between studying in Hong Kong and studying in China, especially from the school culture and learning/teaching perspectives.
Part III, Question 3	<i>Can you tell me how you have adjusted to studying in Hong Kong? Have you made any changes to help you to adjust to the differences you identified earlier? If so, then what sort of changes have you made? Were they significant? Were they easy? Did you feel comfortable making them?</i>	Target Research Question 3:  To discover the adaptation strategies that mainland Chinese students adopt to adjust to the new environment in Hong Kong;  To discover which adaptation strategies are helpful and which are not, and to determine whether these strategies are easy to adopt.
Part IV, Questions 1 & 2	<i>Can you identify any specific steps that this University has taken to support you as a mainland Chinese student? If so, then what have they provided? How useful has this been to you? Why or why not? Is there any support that could have been provided that would have helped you? Please provide details.</i>	Target Research Question 3:  To seek the perceptions of mainland Chinese students about the steps that have been taken by Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions to accommodate their needs;  To see whether these steps have been useful from the mainland Chinese students' perspective;  To find out what support mainland Chinese students expect from Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions.
Part V, Questions 1 & 2	<i>What after-class activities do you take part in? Who do you mix with? Do you feel that you "fit in" well? What plans do you have for after you graduate?</i>	Target Research Question 4:  To see how mainland Chinese students integrate into Hong Kong society;  To discover what plans mainland Chinese students have for after they graduate and how they are preparing for these plans.

### **3.5.3 Interview Protocol**

In planning and carrying out the interview programme, I was concerned to address three key issues to establish the integrity and trustworthiness of my research. The first was a practical issue – would the arrangements I had put in place work effectively? Second, would the interviews generate the data I was looking for? Finally, would the steps taken in conducting, analysing and reporting these interviews allow readers to have confidence in my results? To address these issues, I took a number of steps to ensure that the interviews ran smoothly: 1) I followed the ethical guidelines laid out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004); 2) I distributed the interview schedule before the interviews; 3) I chose an appropriate location to conduct the interviews; and 4) I used the participants' preferred language, Putonghua, during the face-to-face interviews.

The following provides more details about these steps to ensure that interviews ran smoothly. First, to address ethical considerations, I followed step-by-step the BERA's Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2004). At the beginning of the interviews, I assured the respondents that the interviews were strictly confidential and that their names would not be used. Accordingly, the names of all of the respondents have been replaced by codes. I also gained the participants' "informed consent" and told them of their right to withdraw from the study at any point (BERA, 2004). More details of these ethical considerations are provided in Section 3.10 of this chapter.

Second, as previously mentioned, I prepared an interview schedule. I also decided to pre-distribute this schedule to the interviewees, but I made it clear that it was merely a framework for the interview and not a definitive list of questions. I made this decision because I thought some of the students might be anxious about the interview and that giving them the questions in advance might ease some of their anxiety.

Third, I also gave consideration to securing the optimal location for the interviews. This may seem like a small matter, but the interview setting is important in order to make sure the interviewees felt comfortable. Thus, I provided the interviewees with a choice of locations: the University self-study room, my office or another location that they may view as more convenient. If they gave me permission to choose, I chose my office for several

reasons. First, in practical terms, it is difficult to book classrooms in the University for personal use during school time. Second, my office was generally known to these students, although I did not teach them myself. Finally, this location was quiet, convenient and free from disturbance. These were all important factors in creating the right conditions to maximise the benefits of the interviews. Although meeting in my office reinforced my power as the interviewer, I felt that this was acceptable when set against the other advantages of the location.

Fourth, when planning the interviews, an important consideration was deciding on the most appropriate language in which to conduct them. Language is an especially important issue in multicultural settings in which several different languages may be spoken, and it is a key issue in my own research.

Before the interviews started, I asked each interviewee which language he or she would like to use. Most of them expressed the desire to use Putonghua, as this was the native language of both the interviewer and the interviewees, and they felt it would be easier to express their feelings in their mother-tongue. Based on my experience in the pilot interviews, in which language issues had emerged as an important factor in understanding students' experiences, I was very clear that the interviews were preferred to be conducted in Putonghua.

Moreover, in the Post Pilot Interview Evaluation, the students themselves gave several reasons for why they wished to be interviewed in Putonghua. First, it is their native language, and thus they felt its use would make it easier for them to express themselves in the interviews. Second, language emerged as one of the biggest difficulties that mainland Chinese students have in integrating to the University. Thus, it did not seem sensible to allow them to face a language barrier in the interviews. Finally, given my own language capabilities, I was comfortable with the prospect of conducting the interviews in Putonghua and then translating the transcripts into English. However, difficulties do arise when translating from one language into another, even when the translator is proficient. Subtleties in meaning may be lost. As a researcher, however, I took the view that the benefits of holding the interviews in the students' first language outweighed the disadvantages that may stem from translation.

I took notes while conducting the interviews and used prompts and probes to check with each interviewee whether I had understood exactly what he or she wanted to say. The interviews were also tape-recorded and then transcribed and translated. I tried to minimise any translation problems by asking a colleague to look at a random selection of my translations to check them for accuracy. Although a few discrepancies were identified, I am confident that my translations are accurate.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

I began the data analysis process by breaking down the raw data into concepts, which are known as the basic building blocks of theory (Corbin & Strauss 2008). The concepts that appeared to be related to the same phenomenon were then grouped together to form categories and/or sub-categories. This was primarily achieved through an open-coding process as explained in the following section.

#### **3.6.1 *Open Coding – the Process***

Coding is used as the constant comparison of phenomena, cases, concepts and the formulation of the questions addressed in the text, according to Flick (2002). The coding process leads to the development of theories through a process of abstraction. Categorisation refers to the summarising of concepts into generic concepts and to the elaboration of the relationships between concepts and generic concepts or categories and superior concepts. In the current study, impressions, associations, questions, ideas and so on were noted in code notes and memos (discussed in more detail below), which complemented and explained the codes that had been identified (Flick, 2002).

Open coding involves the breaking-up of data, which is then named and labelled. These labels are then closely examined and compared for similarities and differences. Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated that, “open coding is breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocs of raw data” (p.195). This is then used to aid an understanding of the phenomena reflected in the data. The reason to identify the key questions in this research was to find theoretical possibilities in the data that could generate abstract conceptual categories and develop further theories. These categories were developed along the lines of the respective dimensions of the study. Throughout this process, I questioned and



explored my assumptions about the phenomena to lead to new discoveries (Corbin & Strauss 2008, pp. 95-103).

### **3.6.2    *Coding Analysis Samples***

An open-coding sample, which was used on the interview with Participant I-ST1, is presented in Table 8, along with a transcript of the interview and the codes used.

**Table 8.    Example of Segmentation and Open Coding**

<b>Example of Segmentation and Open Coding</b>	
<b>Interview with Participant I-ST1</b>	
Extract of Transcript from Interview with ST1, Tape 1  Date of Interview: 20 January 2006  Time: 13:30-15:00  Place: TU 408  Interviewer: CX  Interviewee: I-ST1  Tape: 0:05-0:20	Code numbers match the script on the left.

Scripts	Codes
<p>My life in Guangzhou was quite good. My father works in a government enterprise. My mother is a primary school teacher.</p> <p>I did one year of Foundation courses at Zhejiang University in order to prepare for going to this University.</p> <p>The reason I came to Hong Kong is because I applied to both a university in China and a university in Hong Kong, and my score exceeded the key university line. By applying to both, I felt I had more choice.</p> <p>Second, the salary in Hong Kong is higher, and there are more opportunities to find a job here. I have been here for more than one year.</p> <p>I applied to four universities in Hong Kong, but only this University admitted me.</p> <p>The teaching methods are different in Hong Kong and China.</p> <p>Here, the courses are taught in English, so this will help me with English.</p> <p>The education is better here. The university emphasises team work.</p> <p>Many activities need to be done in groups. We work together with other students, find documents together and write reports afterwards.</p> <p>In Hong Kong, we need to submit some work every week, so we need to work hard from the beginning to the end of each term.</p>	<p>1) Interviewee is happy about his life in China</p> <p>2) Knows a bit about Hong Kong life and studying</p> <p>3) Convenient to apply for universities in both China and Hong Kong and more choice</p> <p>4) Hong Kong offers economic advantages</p> <p>5) this University made an offer</p> <p>6) Teaching methods are different</p> <p>7) Language issues</p> <p>8) Better education in Hong Kong</p> <p>9) Team work and group activity</p> <p>10) Need to be hardworking</p> <p>11) Hardworking all of the time</p>

(Source: Script from Interview 1 with I-ST1)

### **3.6.3      *Categorisation***

The next step was to categorise the codes by grouping them in relation to the research questions, as shown in Table 9. By following Corbin & Strauss's open-coding theory (2008), 100 codes were generated. The categories were linked to these codes, which were now more abstract than those used in the first step. Flick (2002) states that codes should represent the content of a category in a striking way and, above all, that they should offer an aid to remembering the category reference. To achieve this, I labelled all of the codes relative to the research questions.

The aim of coding was to break down and better understand the text, to attach it to and develop categories, and then to put these categories into order. The result of open coding was a list of codes and categories attached to the text. The content of the codes, categories and memos (notes taken during analysis) helped to answer the research questions, which is the aim of the entire study.

**Table 9. Examples of Codes and Categories**

CODES	CATEGORIES	
	Group 1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviewee is happy about his life in China;</li> <li>• Knows a bit about Hong Kong life and studying;</li> <li>• Better education in Hong Kong;</li> <li>• Hardworking all of the time;</li> <li>• Location is very close to home; short distance;</li> <li>• Hong Kong is the same as Guangzhou for someone from Canton Province;</li> <li>• Convenient to apply for universities in both China and Hong Kong and more choice.</li> </ul>	<p>Target to answer RQ1:</p> <p>Reasons to come to study overseas and choose Hong Kong for their higher education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feelings towards China</li> <li>- Choice of Hong Kong;</li> <li>- Differences between Hong Kong and mainland China.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching methods are different;</li> <li>• Language issues;</li> <li>• Team work and group activity are important in Hong Kong but not in mainland;</li> <li>• Hong Kong is expensive; HKD40,000 per year is very tough for ordinary families.</li> </ul>	Group 2	
	<p>Target to answer RQ2:</p> <p>Experiences in their living and studying in Hong Kong.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Language hurdles;</li> <li>- Financial difficulty;</li> <li>- Learning and Teaching differences.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up a good living schedule;</li> <li>• Asking for help from senior mainland students;</li> <li>• Checking on expenses from credit card slips;</li> <li>• Need to be hardworking;</li> <li>• Emphasis on team work and group activity.</li> </ul>	Group 3	
	<p>Target to answer RQ3:</p> <p>Strategies of adaptation to living and studying in Hong Kong.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strategies for adapting to new learning/teaching methods;</li> <li>- Adjusting oneself to fit in living in Hong Kong.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hong Kong offers economic advantages;</li> <li>• Chinese teaching system is easy;</li> <li>• Unhappy about teaching methods in China;</li> <li>• No need to work hard all of the time;</li> <li>• Expectations for Hong Kong;</li> <li>• Better education;</li> <li>• Good future upon graduation.</li> </ul>	Group 4	
	<p>Target to answer RQ4:</p> <p>Future plans of mainland Chinese students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plans after graduation;</li> <li>- Integration with other students and fitting into society;</li> <li>- How to prepare for the future.</li> </ul>

### **3.6.4     *Samples of Memos***

The aforementioned process was supported by “memos”, or the notes I took as I analysed the text. I adopted this term from Miles and Huberman (1994):

Memos are primarily conceptual in intent. They don't just report data: they tie together different pieces of data into a recognizable cluster, often to show that those data are instances of a general concept. Memos can also go well beyond codes and their relationships to any aspect of the study – personal, methodological, and substantive. They are one of the most useful and powerful sense-making tools at hand.

(Miles & Huberman 1994, p. 72)

Whenever ideas occurred to me or when I made connections amongst the data, I made notes on the transcripts and then re-examined these notes or memos to develop my ideas and conclusions. The following are samples of this “memoing” process, including code notes and theoretical memos. I wrote these memos to myself when I was analysing the transcript of the interview with Participant II-ST4, who was a male student who had been in Hong Kong for more than a year. Table 10 lists the opinions given by the interviewee and the notes made by the researcher.

**Table 10. Example of a Memo Showing Open Data Exploration**

(Based on Interview with Participant II-ST4)

Items	Transcript excerpts	Memos
1	<i>Teaching is different. In China, I received a secondary school education. Here, it is university education. The class structure is similar. After I came here, I found out that class attendance is only counted as a small part of the total grade. Most of the work is done in groups. When we have classes in our subjects, the attendees are not just from our own subject area, but also from other subjects. Group discussions are very important. This is different from China, where exams and class attendance are more important.</i>	<p>1) This male student describes education in China and in Hong Kong as different, although we are not sure whether this is due to the difference between secondary school and university;</p> <p>2) Attendance is not very important here, but in China class attendance and exams are more important;</p> <p>3) Group activities are very important, as are group discussions.</p>
2	<i>Before I came here I had heard my father's friends talking about it, but only after I came did I find out about this big difference.</i>	<p>1) Many things can only be discovered through one's own experiences;</p> <p>2) Research Question 2, which aims to discover the experiences of mainland Chinese students, is a good topic.</p>
3	<i>Here, cooperation is very important. In universities in China, they only need to go to the library and study on their own in order to get good marks, but in Hong Kong it's impossible. Here we need to collaborate with other students. It doesn't work if we do things on our own. Group activities make up the biggest part of the total grade. Presentations and discussions are also very important.</i>	<p>1) The learning methods are also different in Hong Kong and China. Cooperation is very important in Hong Kong, but in China students only need to study on their own. Based on personality, it seems that Chinese students tend to like to be in groups, but Hong Kong students to do things on their own. This seems to be contradictory</p> <p>2) Oral presentation skills are also important in Hong Kong; therefore language skills, especially English, during class are crucial.</p>

The purpose of these memos was to clarify ideas; to tie the code notes to information from other data and to differentiate between the ideas from existing codes and those gleaned from other interviewees; and to compare the data with code notes amongst the different cases (Miles and Huberman 1994, p.74).

The current study used an inductive approach to discover the experiences of mainland Chinese students living and studying in Hong Kong. Therefore, memoing was fundamental. As Miles and Huberman write:

Memoing is especially crucial when you are taking a strongly inductive approach, but it is equally important for other reasons when you begin with a preliminary framework. Without memoing, there is little opportunity to confront just how adequate the original framework is, and where it needs to be revised.

(Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 74)

After coding data, aggregating information into specific concepts, and writing memos and footnotes on the transcripts, I clustered these codes into categories and compared them closely in order to look for relationships and find themes. Then I examined themes across cases to discern those that were common to all cases. This followed the Open Coding process defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as, “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (p.61).

**Table 11. Examples of Data Analysing Process from Transcripts, Codes, Memos, Categories to Themes**

Extracts of Transcripts	Codes	Memos	Categories	Theme
<p>1. I-ST1: <i>I find English language the most difficult;</i></p> <p>2. II-ST1: <i>If we can overcome the difficulty of the languages, we can adjust to living in Hong Kong well;</i></p> <p>3) I-ST5: <i>When I go out, I don't understand Cantonese and I have difficulty talking to people.</i></p>	<p>1. English language is difficult;</p> <p>2. English and Cantonese are both difficult;</p> <p>3. Cantonese is difficult.</p>	<p>1. Some students mentioned only English, some students mentioned only Cantonese;</p> <p>2. Do they have difficulties with both? Which one caused more problems?</p> <p>3. Where do these languages cause problems?</p>	<p>1. Language difficulty in study;</p> <p>2. Language difficulty In living;</p> <p>3. Experience of living in Hong Kong.</p>	<p>Research Question 2 (RQ2):</p> <p>Identifying the experiences that mainland Chinese students had after they came to study and live in Hong Kong.</p>

This process helped set up the theoretical framework, and develop a theory and finally lead to answers to the Research Questions. As shown in Table 11, the categories which included 1) Language difficulty in study, 2) Language difficulty in living and 3) Experience of living in Hong Kong, later became the categories of finding answers to Research Question 2 (RQ2) about mainland students' experiences in studying in Hong Kong, as discussed in Sections 4.5 and 4.6.



### **3.7 Validity/Reliability and Trustworthiness**

Validity and reliability are central to establishing the quality of educational research. However, qualitative and quantitative researchers have different notions of these concepts (Punch 2005; Creswell 2007; Gall, Gall & Borg 2003; Cohen et al. 2000), with quantitative researchers relying more heavily on them. Reliability refers to the research process being repeatable, with repetitions producing broadly the same research results. Validity refers to the findings being an accurate reflection of what the researcher was seeking to find out. Most qualitative researchers (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Cohen et al. 2000) agree that, because their research is based on different assumptions about reality, different views of the world and different paradigms, they need different conceptualisations of validity and reliability. Positivism assumes that reality can be objectively known, but qualitative researchers dispute this, instead arguing that individuals create their own subjective realities. The researcher occupies a central place in the process of inquiry and often interacts with the participants in a process of mutual influence. It may also be argued that no type of inquiry process or knowledge is better than another. As qualitative researchers, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research, and they explicitly offered these as alternatives to more traditional quantitatively oriented criteria. Guba (1981) also proposed certain operational techniques for testing trustworthiness that better fit the needs of qualitative research and also suggested that the terms used in quantitative research be changed. He suggested “credibility” instead of internal validity, “transferability” instead of external validity, “dependability” instead of reliability, and “confirmability” instead of objectivity (Guba 1981, pp. 75-92).

In the current study, I aimed to achieve these criteria by being rigorous and transparent throughout the stages of the research process. Rigour was achieved by carefully selecting my sample, piloting the interview schedule and adopting a systematic approach to analysing the data. A key part of the research process was “transparency”. I aimed to be very clear about exactly what I did at all stages of this process, and I provided a clear “audit trail” of my work. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have proposed auditing as a principal means of establishing whether criteria of dependability and confirmability have been achieved. The following is an example of the audit trail framework, using the structure suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.382-384):

**Table 12. Example of Audit Trail: Categories, File Types, Evidence and Examples**

Audit Trail Classification	File Types	Evidence	Examples of Task Done
Raw Data:  done on October 20, 2006	A. Audiotapes;  B. Handwritten notes during the interviews;  C. Transcripts in computer software.	a. Face-to-face interviews with 1 participant;  b. Interview schedule started with a brief description about the Interviewee's background, such as:  1. the name;  2. the department;  3. how long he/she has been in Hong Kong?  4. where did he/she come from?  5. who supports his/her study in Hong Kong, by scholarship or by his/her parents?	Conducted Interview 1 with one student from Electrical and Electronic Department (EEE);  Labelled as I-ST1;  Date and Time: October 20, 2006, 2:30-4:10PM;  Time length: 1 hour 40 minutes;  Venue: GHXXX.
Data reduction and analysis done on October 21-30, 2006	This interview was successful. Some questions were raised by this student, such as:  1. language issue;  2. his worries;  3. reasons why he chose to come to Hong Kong.	a. Handwritten notes on the Transcript of the interview with this student labelled as I-ST1;  b. Put the handwritten notes in his hardcopy file;  c. Put the transcription in the computer filed as: TranscriptI-ST1.	A. Taking notes during the interview;  B. Typed the transcripts in the computer after the interview on the same night;  C. Identified some questions worthwhile of doing research: what difficulties in Hong Kong, if any; how did the university support him?

Data reconstructed  done on November 2006	Identify Categories and Themes from the Interview Transcript:  A: Reasons why mainland Chinese students choose to come to Hong Kong;  B. What are their experiences in Hong Kong?	Concepts identified from interview with I-ST1 included:  a. Good Education in Hong Kong;  b. Good economic situation of Hong Kong;  c. Why not want to stay in China?  d. Why not choose another country than Hong Kong?	Categories identified:  A. Differences between Hong Kong and China;  B. Difficulties in study;  C. Difficulties in living in Hong Kong;  These categories formed Research Question 1.
Process notes  Done on December 2006	Decided to use Case Study to conduct the research on this issue;  More issues were found out through other interviews, total 19, each interview lasted about 1h30.	Checked on: Dependability, Confirmability, Credibility, Transferability, Member checks, Triangulation reactions, Cross-references.	References:  Strauss & Corbin, 1990  Lincoln & Guba, 1985  Miles & Huberman, 1994
Intentions and disposition  October 2006	Sampling method decided based on Gall, Gall & Borg:  Snowball Sampling;  opportunistic sampling;  Maximum Variation Sampling.	Written document;  Bibliography;  Self-evaluation and criticism.	Lincoln & Guba. 1985  Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003  Strauss & Corbin, 1990
Instrument development  October 2006-  October 2007	Data analysis tools:  Organise all the codes and categories by cards;  Labelled clearly in different codes:  Learning/Teaching with Interviewee I-ST1: LTI-ST1.	Rough drafts;  Feedback notes;  Modify Research Questions;  Write all codes and categories on cards so it is easy to sort them and organise them.	Added Research Question 1    "What are the reasons why mainland students chose Hong Kong for their higher education?"

The audit trail provides evidence of conducting the research rigorously and allows the reader to follow procedures and records put in place to ensure the quality of the evidence gathered (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Halpern 1983). I believe these steps ensure that the research presented here is “trustworthy” – a crucial requirement in qualitative research.

The following is an explanation of how I secured the rigour of my research and how I met, systematically and step-by-step, the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 301-320).

1) Credibility: I prolonged the data collection period to two years (from 2006 to 2008), and I selected my sample carefully from amongst a wide group of students who studied in different departments and came from different parts of China. The interview participants had been living and studying in Hong Kong for different lengths of time: one group had been in Hong Kong for less than one year and the other for more than a year. I was eager to determine the differences in their experiences and their adaptation strategies.

2) Transferability: This research did not aim for transferability, but rather the provision of thick descriptions of context, time, place and issues to allow readers to draw parallels and find similarities and differences between this situation and other situations in Hong Kong or elsewhere. A number of theoretical memos were able to capture theoretical and analytical ideas based on the data, concepts, codes and categories, but no generalisable theory was formulated.

3) Dependability: This was achieved by an audit trail that tracked the data at all stages of analysis and systematically organised methods of data recording, storage and retrieval (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 319). All of the interviews were recorded, with all of the audio data stored on tapes and the transcripts in hard copies and on a computer drive.

4) Confirmability: The research data are grounded in real events. They were retrieved from semi-structured, individual face-to-face interviews with nineteen mainland Chinese students. Concepts and categories were formed by analysing the data collected, and this process led to the findings on the research questions, as shown in Section 3.6.3.

I used member checking in order to secure the trustworthiness of my research data. I showed the transcripts of two of the interviews to a colleague who understood both English and Chinese. The colleague corroborated the accuracy of the English translation.

For two other interviews, I used the crosschecking method and I showed the transcripts to other mainland students to see whether I had interpreted the interview data in a trustworthy way. I repeated this process frequently to ensure credibility.

### **3.8 Generalisability**

This study does not provide generalisability, and it did not aim to (as previously discussed) achieve generalisability. Lincoln and Guba (1995) note that “the Only Generalisation is: there is no generalisation” (p. 110). The researcher believed that each case was unique, and thus that every case should be studied in context and understood in its complexity and entirety (Punch 2005, p.154). Therefore, the study is not generalisable to a wider group, and the findings on the research questions are not meant to be broadly applicable.

However, the researcher does believe that the theoretical concepts generated from the data may be “transferable”. This means that people working in other Higher Education Institutions in Hong Kong may be able to relate to my conclusions, which may help them to better understand their own experiences. Wolcott (1995) argues that each case study is unique, but not so unique that others cannot learn from it. In this regard, I did choose to place the responsibility for generalisation on the reader or “consumer” rather than on the researcher. Thus, it is the reader’s or case study user’s responsibility to decide whether the findings are applicable to his/her own situation. The researcher’s obligation is to provide a thick description of the participants, setting and context, so that the reader can compare his/her situation with that of the case (Dimmock and O’Donoghue 1996).

### **3.9 Researcher's Positioning with Respect to the Research**

I was employed as a language instructor at the same institution that the respondents attended, and therefore there may have been a conflict of interest. To minimise this potential conflict, I decided not to interview any of the students in my own classes. I also took the steps described earlier to put the students at ease and to avoid having them feel uncomfortable being interviewed by a staff member. The students were asked questions about their personal experiences during the interviews, but I do not think that my position in the institution caused them problems. Although I was closely related to the research context, I was not familiar with the students. In fact, my position may be considered a strength. I came from mainland China, and I too went overseas to pursue graduate studies in an English-speaking country. Therefore, in some respects I have had similar experiences to those of the mainland students in this study. This helped me to build empathy with the interviewees and helped to put them at ease. I believe that my role as a researcher was to make the best use of my knowledge and experience without imposing my own ideas on the students' voices. It was not easy, but I feel that I was relatively successful.

#### ***3.9.1 Pros and Cons of Being an Insider-Researcher***

There are advantages and disadvantages to conducting research in one's own institution. Shah (2004) suggested that "a social insider is better positioned as a researcher because of his/her knowledge of the relevant patterns of social interaction required for gaining access and making meaning" (p. 556). However, Hammersley (1993) indicated that "there are no overwhelming advantages to being an insider or an outsider" (p. 219). Mercer (2007) believes that the fact that "the researcher shares the same gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation with the individuals being researched does not, of itself, make the data any richer" (p. 5). This researcher believes that the advantages of conducting research as an insider include the following: 1) easy access to the participants and information; 2) stronger rapport and a deeper, more readily available frame of shared references by which to interpret the data collected (Mercer 2007, p. 13); 3) a better understanding of the social setting, because the researcher is familiar with the context and understands the subtle and diffuse links between situations and events; and 4) the avoidance of the disorientation and anxiety-producing effects of culture shock (Hockey 1993, p. 204). The disadvantages of insider research are: 1) that "greater familiarity can make insiders more likely to take

things for granted, develop myopia, and assume their own perspective is far more widespread than it actually is" (Mercer 2007, p. 6); 2) that certain "obvious" questions may not be asked; 3) that the vital significance of "unmarked" points may go unnoticed; 4) that "sensitive" topics may not be raised; and 5) that shared prior experiences may not be explained, assumptions may not be challenged, seemingly shared norms may not be articulated, and data may become thinner as a result (Mercer 2007, p. 6).

### **3.9.2     *The Position of the Researcher in this Study***

I believe that I was able to capitalise on the advantages of being an insider in this study. First, as a mainland Chinese who was born in Beijing and left China to pursue my studies in Canada and the US, later going to Hong Kong to work as a Putonghua teacher, I was better equipped to understand mainland Chinese students than an outsider or someone who had never had similar experiences. Second, as a Putonghua teacher who worked in the same institution that the nineteen participants studied in, I believe that I was able to generate thick data through my face-to-face interviews with them. They shared many issues with me that they may not have shared with an outsider, with someone who could not speak Putonghua, Cantonese and English, or with someone who could not understand the context in which we both lived and worked. These issues included the special difficulties inherent in learning Cantonese and English for mainland Chinese students; the adaptation strategies they adopted to live and study in Hong Kong; and how they attempted to fit in with Hong Kong society and mix with Hong Kong students.

However, to avoid the disadvantages of being an insider, I took a number of steps. First, I did not select my own students or any students that I had taught in the previous two years for my research sample. Second, as an insider-researcher, I faced such dilemmas as informant bias, interview reciprocity and research ethics (Mercer 2007, p. 13). To minimise any bias, I avoided making my own opinions or stance about the research topic known, and I did not discuss my own story during the interviews, as this would have "contaminated" the data. Instead, I gave the interviewees the freedom to fully express themselves, and I assured them that all of the information they provided would be kept strictly confidential and would never be shared with their peers or teachers. Third, to remind myself of topics I may have forgotten, taken for granted or ignored, I ended the interviews with a general question: "Do you have any other issues that you would like to

share?" The result was that a few of the interviewees brought up topics that were not on the interview schedule, but which are important, such as that Hong Kong is not controlled by the "one child" policy, as is China. Those interviews who wanted a larger family very much appreciated this advantage of Hong Kong's "one country, two systems" policy.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

Making sure the research was conducted with integrity and with respect for the participants was an important consideration. I ensured that my research met ethical guidelines by taking the following steps. First, all of the respondents were given a full briefing of the purpose of the research and interviewed on a one-to-one basis. Second, consent was obtained to audio-record the interviews, and it was explained that this was to ensure the authenticity and trustworthiness of the transcripts. Third, assurance was given to all the participants about their privacy with regard to participation and the confidentiality of the information they provided. Codes were used in place of their actual names on the interview paper, and all of the transcripts were anonymised. Finally, the participants were informed of their right to stop the interview at any point or to refuse to answer any questions.

I adopted the following measures to ensure that all of the information provided by the participants was treated with strict confidentiality and that their voluntary, informed consent was obtained.

1) Regarding my responsibilities to the participants, the BERA Revised Ethical Guidelines (2004) state: "The participants in research may be the active or passive subjects of such processes as observation, inquiry, experiment or test" (p.5). In this study, the participants were part of the context, and they were also individual research cases. I was merely a researcher interested in finding out about the experiences of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong, which was not related to my job. Therefore, as previously stated, I made sure that I did not interview my current students or any students that I had taught in the previous two years.

2) Regarding voluntary informed consent (BERA 2004, p. 6), all of the participants were told about the interview process and that their participation had to be voluntary and informed. Thus, they had the full right to withdraw from the research for any or no



reason and at any time they wished. They were also put at their ease, and did not feel under any pressure or discomfort during the research process.

3) Regarding the use of the information they provided, I explained the purpose of the research to all of the participants. Thus, they were informed that their participation was necessary to uncover the real experiences and adaptation strategies of mainland Chinese students living and studying in Hong Kong. They were ensured that the information they provided was for research purposes only, would not be reported to anyone else and would not affect their studies at the institution.

4) Regarding confidentiality and anonymity, I made sure that all of the interviewees were treated with respect and according to the ethical considerations described in the BERA 2004 guidelines. All of the participant data were treated with confidentiality, and all of the participants were labelled with codes to ensure their anonymity. The interviews covered sensitive ground, and without privacy few people would be frank.

### **3.11 Summary**

This chapter explores the use of a qualitative case-study method as a research approach to illuminate the experiences of mainland Chinese students who had come to study at the University. I feel that this method was well-suited to an exploration of these experiences, as the issues surrounding them are subtle and complex, and semi-structured, face to face interviews are suitable for exploring the details of such issues. It was important to be able to convey the “multiple realities” of different students. Interviews, with the rich data they generate, are capable of doing so.

However, as several researchers have indicated, it is important to ensure that interviews are appropriately planned, as there are a number of dangers that may arise during the interview process (Flick 2002; Punch 2005; Gall, Gall & Borg 2003; Cohen et al. 2000; Miles & Huberman 1994). At the practical level, it was important to pay attention to organisational details to ensure that the process ran smoothly. The researcher was fully aware that poor organisation could give the interviewee an amateurish impression, which is likely to affect the quality of the data generated.

This highlights the need for an effective interview schedule and the need for rigorous procedures to analyse the data. My aim has been to develop a rigorous approach to my research by thinking carefully about the sampling, interview and data analysis procedures and then to make these procedures very clear to the reader. Establishing the trustworthiness of my research is uppermost in importance.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS (I) - WHY MAINLAND STUDENTS DECIDE TO STUDY OVERSEAS AND WHY THEY CHOOSE HONG KONG**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The purposes of this study are first, to investigate the reasons why mainland students choose Hong Kong for their higher education; second, to understand the experiences that mainland Chinese students have while they study and live in Hong Kong; third, to reveal the range of strategies mainland students adopt to ensure successful adaptation to living and studying in Hong Kong. A further aim is to elicit the future plans of the students after graduation in Hong Kong.

This chapter seeks to contribute to the emerging research tradition of comparative cross-cultural study by addressing Research Questions 1 (RQ1) and 2 (RQ2) and Specific Research Questions 1-4:

**(RQ1)** Why do mainland Chinese students choose Hong Kong for their higher education?

**(RQ2)** What experiences do mainland Chinese students have while living and studying in Hong Kong?

In order to answer Research Question 1, the following are the Specific Research Questions:

**SRQ 1** Why do mainland Chinese students opt to study overseas rather than stay in China for their higher education?

**SRQ 2** What are the reasons for mainland Chinese students choosing Hong Kong for their higher education rather than elsewhere overseas?

In order to answer Research Question 2, the following are the Specific Research Questions:

**SRQ 3** What are the living experiences of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong?

**SRQ 4** What are the studying experiences of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong?

The findings of the four Research Questions and seven Specific Research Questions will be presented in two chapters. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the data analysis associated with Research Questions 1 and 2 including Specific Research Questions 1 to 4. Chapter 5 will present only the findings of the data analysis associated with Research Questions 3 and 4 including Specific Research Questions 5 to 7.

Chapter 4 begins with a description of all respondents followed by a section classifying and organising the data into sections to address each research question. This chapter examines the data on what influences students' decisions to go to Hong Kong for their university education. It also presents different aspects of the experiences they faced while living and studying in Hong Kong.

## **4.2 Description of Participants**

The primary data relate to nineteen mainland Chinese students at a Hong Kong institution named the University. The students were in different departments, and had been studying in Hong Kong for varied lengths of time. On this basis, they were divided into three groups as shown in Table 13:

**Table 13. Three Groups of Participants**

Group I:	Seven participants forming Group I had been in Hong Kong for less than a year.
Group II:	Eight participants in Group II had been in Hong Kong for more than a year.
Group III:	Four participants in Group III were added later to seek more data on Research Questions 1 and 4 including Specific Research Questions 1, 2, 7.

The purpose of studying the first two groups was to see whether the students' strategies of adjustment changed over time. At a later stage of writing the thesis, the researcher found that the original data collected was not sufficient to answer Research Questions 1 and 4 with Specific Research Questions 1, 2 and 7. Therefore, a third group was formed to seek more information on Specific Research Questions 1, 2 and 7. Each interview lasted one hour to one and half hour.

All participants were labelled with individual codes. For example, student 1 in Group I was labelled as I-ST1, and student 1 in Group II was labelled as II-ST1. Student profiles are illustrated in Section 3.5.1 and the details of the participants in Group I are shown in Table 4, the participants in Group II are in Table 5, and the participants in Group III in Table 6, and details of participants are shown in Appendix 4.

The respondents were selected, as Chapter 3 explains, using a combination of purposive sampling methods as defined by Gall, Gall & Borg (2003), including *opportunistic sampling*, *maximum variation sampling*, and *snowball sampling*.

The participants come from different cities and provinces of China. Their native languages are different, as are their family backgrounds. All but one of the participants is an only child. Their financial situations vary depending on whether their education is sponsored with scholarships or self-financed. The average living and tuition expenses per school year in Hong Kong are \$100,000HKD, which covers school fees (\$60,000HKD), accommodation in the University Students Hall (\$10,000HKD) and general living expenses (30,000HKD), according to the University Student's Handbook (2008).

The ability to cope with financial costs is a central issue in adapting to life and study in Hong Kong. Consequently, one aim of this study is to assess the importance of students' financial situations in their adaptation to Hong Kong. Those students receiving a scholarship for four years might find themselves in an easier financial situation than those who are self-sponsored. However, the academic pressure might be greater. For example, if they do not receive excellent grades, they might lose their scholarship. The students who depend on their families to pay for their tuition and accommodation might have a different situation. If their family has a high income or a good reserve of savings, those students might find living in Hong Kong relatively easy, with less pressure on them to do well. If the family has difficulty providing the \$100,000HKD per year, the student might

also have great financial pressure. The characteristics of the mainland Chinese students may help to understand why they selected Hong Kong, and how they have adapted to living and studying in a new environment. Almost all of them live in the Students Hall.

The study also explores whether the native language of the mainland Chinese students plays an important role in their adaptation to Hong Kong. If they are fluent in Cantonese and their family lives in Guangdong Province, which borders Hong Kong to the mainland China, then their adaptation might be easier than say, Mandarin-speaking students from northern China.

The participants cover a wide range of sampling criteria, as follows: 1) Gender: there are seven male students and twelve female students; 2) Language Background: four participants are from Canton Province and speak Cantonese; fifteen participants do not speak Cantonese; 3) Financial Situation: three participants are sponsored with scholarships and sixteen participants are self-sponsored by their families, among whom three participants do not have an easy financial background as their parents were retired or did not have a job, and thirteen participants are in a good financial situation as their parents were well paid in their job or in their own business; 4) Study Subject: three participants are from the School of Engineering, including the departments of Electrical Engineering, Electronic and Information Engineering and Building and Real Estate Engineering; four participants are from the School of Applied Sciences including the departments of Mathematics and Biology; twelve participants are from the School of Business including the departments of Logistics, Marketing and Management, Accounting and Finance; 5) Place of Origin: eleven participants come from Southern China, including Shanghai and provinces of Sichuan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Zhejiang; four from Northern China, particularly Beijing and four from Canton Province including Guangzhou, and Shenzhen.

### **4.3 Reasons why Mainland Chinese Students Opt to Study Overseas rather than Stay in China for their Higher Education**

The reasons for mainland students to seek higher education outside China relate to social and economic conditions in both China and overseas. Students compared the relative advantages of studying in China and overseas before making their decision. It was, in all cases, a rational decision. From the data collected through interviews with nineteen participants, their reasons fall into three categories: societal, economic and educational.

Each category includes *push* and *pull factors* that influence mainland students to leave China for their higher education. *Push factors* refer to the current situation in mainland China that influences students to leave for their education. *Pull factors* refer to the advantages overseas, such as the US, the UK, Europe, and Hong Kong, which attract many mainland students each year.

#### **4.3.1 Societal Reasons**

##### **4.3.1.1 Push factors**

Not being admitted by the elite universities in China such as Beijing University, Tsinghua University or Zhejiang University was the main reason for many participants (III-ST2, I-ST5, II-ST1, II-ST5) to choose to go overseas. They stated that if they had been admitted by these top Chinese universities, they might not even have thought of leaving. II-ST1 indicated:

If I had been admitted by big universities of the mainland, such as Tsinghua University or Beijing University, maybe I wouldn't have come overseas, but my score was not good enough to go to these two most famous universities of the mainland. [II-ST1]

If I could go to Zhejiang University, I would not have come here. The reasons why I wanted to go to Zhejiang University are: I like it very much; I like architecture there; it is close to my home. [II-ST5]

Participants III-ST1 and III-ST4 provide a counter-example. III-ST1 was admitted by Beijing University to study psychology as her first choice but she believed that she would not like that department and so she chose to go to Hong Kong. III-ST4 was admitted by Zhongshan University in Guangzhou as her first choice but she also decided to go to Hong Kong to study Business as she believed that her future would be brighter after her graduation from the Faculty of Business in Hong Kong.

China's one-child policy was one of the reasons Chinese students did not want to stay in China as they did not just want to have one child. This is why II-ST4 did not want to stay in the mainland; he came from a family with two children and wanted to have a large family later. Other countries are not restricted by the One Child Family Planning Policy, so students could have more than one child if they move elsewhere. II-ST4 claimed:

I want to have two children. Due to the one-child policy of the mainland, I cannot have two children legally there. There are two children in my family: my sister and I. I feel that a family with two children is better. [II-ST4]

Thus the decision to leave China to study overseas involved long-term reasons such as the wish to have a family with more than one child.

#### **4.3.1.2 Pull factors**

Experiencing Western culture was another attraction. For example, II-ST4 was fascinated by the British lifestyle and was very fond of British culture and Western architecture. He was attracted by cross-cultural comparison and was eager to enjoy the feeling of "East meets West"; therefore he was eager for the opportunity to go overseas:

I wanted to experience the exchange of Eastern and Western cultures. From a very young age, I have been fond of architecture. I spent six years practicing architecture sketch. I like British culture, living style, aesthetics and architecture.

[II-ST4]

For participant III-ST1, going overseas was her dream since childhood. With her high score of 690 in the PRC National University Entrance Exam in 2006, the Beijing University admitted her, but she decided to go to Hong Kong instead:



I attended an International School in Nanjing and going overseas was my long time dream. I was admitted by the Beijing University to study psychology but I realised that what I would learn there would not be suitable for me as the knowledge there was not linked to the international market. That's why I decided to go overseas.

[III-ST1]

### **4.3.2 *Economic Reasons***

#### **4.3.2.1 *Push factors***

The findings indicate that the main reason why mainland Chinese students opt to study overseas is economic. It is related to the high unemployment rate in China. Participants, such as II-ST8 and I-ST1, indicated that the competition for university graduates to find good jobs in China was very fierce and unemployment levels in China were high:

In China, for a graduate from an average university the future is not bright. [II-ST8]

Participants III-ST1 and III-ST3 believed that the chance for them to find a good job in an international company in China would be slim if they only did their university education in China. They were concerned that they could not compete with other Chinese graduates for a big company with a decent salary. III-ST3 indicated:

The reason why I chose to go overseas is I wanted to take an opportunity to prepare myself. I hope I can go back to China to find a job in an international company in Shanghai after my graduation. The environment outside can train me to have greater independence. [III-ST3]

#### **4.3.2.2 *Pull factors***

Participants, such as III-ST1 and III-ST2, believed that after their graduation from universities in other advanced countries, they could make a higher salary than if they were educated in China.

I believe that after my graduation from a university overseas, I could make a higher salary. This could cover the tuition fees I paid during these years when I studied outside. I call studying overseas as an education investment. [III-ST1]

Participants III-ST1 and III-ST2 also believed that China, as a developing country, needed university graduates who received their education in other advanced countries and who were Chinese from the mainland to go back to help their home country to develop.

If I do my university education overseas, I hope that after my graduation I could be employed by an international company in China, maybe Shanghai. At that time I would have international education and work experiences, I would also like to go back to Shanghai. [III-ST2]

### **4.3.3 Educational Reasons**

#### **4.3.3.1 Push factors**

Many participants (I-ST1, I-ST2, II-ST2, II-ST3, II-ST6, III-ST1, III-ST2) indicated that they chose to go overseas for their higher education because of educational reasons. They did not like Chinese teaching methods or the education system. Participants I-ST1, I-ST2, II-ST2, II-ST3 and II-ST6 believed that Chinese education was not recognized internationally, whereas an overseas education is, as II-ST2 indicated:

The knowledge of my field (Biology) that I would learn in China is not recognised internationally, but what I learn in Hong Kong is recognised across the world.

[II-ST2]

Participants III-ST1 and III-ST3 believed that the teaching methods in China were too theoretical and required only memorisation without practical application:

The teaching methods of the mainland were so inflexible. Students only learn the knowledge but do not need to know how to use it. Teachers' quality is not as good as teachers in other countries. [III-ST3]

I think that knowledge learned in China is not linked to the international market. For example in Psychology, they still use communist or socialist ideas to lead this subject. [III-ST1]

Participant II-ST5's interest is in literature and her plan is to study at MIT in the US or the National University of Singapore, and leaving mainland China was the first step to reach her dream:

I came to study Electrical Engineering but I have no interest in this field at all. In fact I was most interested in literature. The final objective is to go overseas, such as to MIT in the US, or National University in Singapore, but I needed to get out of the country first. [II-ST5]

#### **4.3.3.2      *Pull factors***

Some subjects can only be studied in other countries, such as zoology for II-ST2 and global chain supply for many students (III-ST2, III-ST3, III-ST4). II-ST2 indicated that she wanted to work in animal protection and find a job to protect big animals. The programme was very advanced in other countries but not in Hong Kong or in the mainland:

I spent one year in Zhejiang to do the Foundation, but that year was a waste. What I learned was very easy, the exams were also too easy. The study was so relaxing. I took courses of chemistry, math, zoology, but all these courses were completely useless for my study in Hong Kong. If it's possible, I would like to study zoology as this is my real interest. I want to continue my studies in Hong Kong or go to overseas to continue my study, but I don't want to return to China. I would like to work on animal protection, especially of big animals. Here there is no zoology subject. I want to find a job to protect the big animals. [II-ST2]

From the above discussion, it is clear that the reasons for mainland students wanting to study overseas relate not only to the contextual situation of China but also overseas conditions. These reasons involve societal, educational and economic factors. The following section will present the reasons why mainland students specifically choose Hong Kong over other countries.

#### **4.4 Reasons for Mainland Chinese Students Choosing Hong Kong for their Higher Education rather than Elsewhere Overseas**

Despite international universities' attempts to recruit Chinese students, Hong Kong seems to have many advantages over other countries. In China all universities are divided by the Ministry of Education into different categories, such as first category universities and standard universities. After the annual National University Examinations, first category universities are allowed to set up a score to recruit students first. For example, in 2008 the key university admission score was 515 for Social Science and 502 for Science (<http://gaokao.eol.cn>, 2009). Those students who receive a high score for the key universities can apply to universities in mainland China and Hong Kong, as indicated by I-ST1, I-ST2, II-ST1. Therefore applying for both Hong Kong universities and mainland top universities offers a better chance to these students (I-ST1, I-ST2, II-ST5, II-ST6 and II-ST7). The following examples illustrate this convenience:

The reason that I came to Hong Kong is that at that time I could apply both for a university in China and a university in Hong Kong and my score qualified for the First Category universities. When I applied for both sides, I could have a choice. At that time I applied to four universities in Hong Kong and only this university admitted me. [I-ST1]

At the time, I applied together with some of my classmates as a group to gain a place in Hong Kong. This could allow me to apply to mainland universities as well as Hong Kong universities. I could have an opportunity to come to study in Hong Kong. Through this bridge I can go overseas later on and do my studies in other countries such as the US, the UK and Canada. [II-ST7]

Based on the interview data, the overall reasons for choosing Hong Kong are related both to personal and contextual factors, but they can be categorised into three themes: *societal*, *economic* and *educational*. The following sections will examine these reasons in more detail.

#### **4.4.1 Societal Reasons**

Participants I-ST1, I-ST2, I-ST7, II-ST1, II-ST2, II-ST6 and II-ST7 indicated that there were many advantages in Hong Kong that were not available in mainland China or in other countries. Hong Kong has a bilingual environment (Chinese and English are spoken there) and offers a mixture of both Chinese and Western cultures (I-ST2, I-ST7); Hong Kong is a bridge to go to overseas (II-ST1, II-ST2, II-ST7); Hong Kong is closer to China than other countries (I-ST1, II-ST6); and people are able to exchange Eastern and Western cultures (II-ST4).

For participants I-ST1, II-ST4, II-ST2, whose families lived in Guangdong province, adjacent to Hong Kong, the lifestyle was similar to Hong Kong, so adapting to the new environment was easier (I-ST1, II-ST2). II-ST4 also indicated the advantage of being close to home:

I often go home and communicate with my family. I need to talk to them about my life here and feel relaxed. My parents don't want me to go far from home. That is the reason why they asked me to come to Hong Kong so I can go home quite often. My family is very happy to see me home. [II-ST4]

I-ST5 indicated that the reason why he chose to go to Hong Kong was related to the environment there:

I like the environment here. The people's culture and quality here are different from China. [I-ST5]

III-ST3 gave the reason for choosing Hong Kong to study as her family reunion:

My father works in Hong Kong so for me going to Hong Kong is like a family reunion. [III-ST3]

I-ST7 commented that people in Hong Kong were often very friendly and streets were very clean compared with the mainland. It was safe to walk on the streets in Hong Kong and people were not afraid of walking alone at night. In the mainland this kind of safety was not possible.

#### **4.4.2    *Economic Reasons***

Economic reasons influence many mainland Chinese students to opt for overseas study and relocation upon graduation. Economic reasons include funding for education and opportunities for future employment. The tuition is affordable for a Chinese family with a decent income (I-ST2).

My family has a large income so my parents can support my study in Hong Kong financially. [I-ST2]

II-ST6 echoed this sentiment. He said:

The fees for studying Marketing are very high, I like studying Marketing here as I think that this subject is better than the one in China. I didn't expect anything before I came here. For Business subjects, Hong Kong is better than China. The second reason is my mother can be close to me if I come to Hong Kong. [II-ST6]

For I-ST7, the reason of going to Hong Kong is relatively cheaper than going to other countries such as the US, Europe and Australia. Several students listed this among their reasons to choose Hong Kong:

The reasons why I chose to come to Hong Kong are: this university has a good reputation; Hong Kong has a good background as it is the mixture of both Eastern and Western civilisations; the tuition fee is not as expensive as in the US and Europe; Hong Kong universities have a good reputation in the Great China Region. [I-ST7]

Participants II-ST1, I-ST1, II-ST2 had clear plans for the future before going to Hong Kong. Participant I-ST6 stated that she was admitted by a university in mainland China in the English Department, but she did not want to study English, and went to Hong Kong so that she could study Finance. For I-ST7, II-ST3 and II-ST8, going to Hong Kong signalled an intention to find a job there after graduation. Several students (I-ST1, II-ST1, II-ST8, III-ST3) stated that Hong Kong would offer a more promising future for university graduates as there were more job opportunities there compared with the mainland. They cited future incentives as reasons for going to Hong Kong now:

I would like to work here. If that's not possible, I would go back home. My parents want me to try my best to work here or to stay here in Hong Kong. [II-ST8]

Two other economic reasons are that Hong Kong universities offer scholarships to excellent students, and mainland students can find a better job with a higher salary in Hong Kong after their graduation here:

I decided to come to Hong Kong to study because of the following three reasons:  
1) They gave me a scholarship; 2) In Hong Kong courses are taught in English and  
3) When they asked me to choose a subject, I chose Finance as I knew that Hong Kong is excellent in Finance and filled with opportunities so I was happy for that.  
[II-ST3]

Three participants (I-ST4, I-ST5, II-ST3) had full scholarships of \$100,000 HKD per year for a period of three to four years. That was the main reason for them to choose Hong Kong for their education:

I got a scholarship of \$100,000 HKD per year for three years. The university deducts the tuition of \$40,000 per year and the fee to the Hall from the scholarship and gives us the rest which is enough to cover living expenses. [I-ST4]

Parents and families often played an important role in the choice to go overseas. Participants II-ST2, II-ST4, II-ST6, II-ST8, III-ST1 and III-ST2 all indicated that their parents paid for their studies overseas and their role was important in their decision to go to Hong Kong:

My family sent me all the money in one go, so I need to use money carefully. Here I need to spend \$100,000HKD per year, including accommodation, tuition fees, living expenses. My family pays it for me entirely. My family doesn't allow me to study zoology. They want me to study Biology, economics or other fields. Financially I depend on my family. Even though I also have a gap with my family, I have to listen to my parents when I make my decisions. [II-ST2]

Participant II-ST4 came from Shenzhen, a city very close to Hong Kong, and he often returned home to see his family, but he still felt the differences between Hong Kong and the mainland:

My parents think that the distance between the mainland and Hong Kong is not far but the cultural differences are quite big. [II-ST4]

Hong Kong offers many attractions compared to other destinations. Some participants (I-ST6, II-ST7, II-ST8) intended to stay in Hong Kong and find a job there after they graduated. Some participants (I-ST5, II-ST1, II-ST5, II-ST6 and II-ST7) intended to use Hong Kong as a bridge to another country, such as the US, Canada or Europe, to further their study:

The reason why I came to this university is because I didn't have a choice. After the National University Entrance Examinations, I was admitted here. My expectations are I want to learn something in university curriculum, I want to work here, I want to make some friends, I don't have big expectations and I want to use this as a bridge to go overseas for further study. [I-ST5]

#### **4.4.3 *Educational Reasons***

Participants I-ST3, I-ST4, I-ST7, II-ST1, II-ST2, II-ST8 believed that Hong Kong universities had a good reputation in China. In Hong Kong the education in some subjects, for example Business, is better than in China. Business students, such as I-ST2 and II-ST1, believed that Hong Kong could provide good training for them and let them experience new things and meet new teachers.

Before I came to Hong Kong, I was looking forward to getting to know more people and to know teachers who had an international reputation in my research area and who were experts in Business. These opportunities were not available in China.

[I-ST2]

According to Participants I-ST2 and I-ST3, the fact that Hong Kong universities sent staff to mainland China to promote their universities and recruit new students influenced mainland students who chose Hong Kong for their study:

Why did I come to Hong Kong? Because I like Biology and I would like to go to America or the U.K. for further development. There is a high level of knowledge in my field. This year was the first time that this university was recruiting students



directly from China, and it was a good opportunity for me to receive education in English in Hong Kong. I appreciated that opportunity as I would like to go overseas.  
[I-ST3]

The participants believed that the teaching methods in Hong Kong were more advanced than in China. As I-ST4 said:

Compared with Hong Kong, China is behind. It's impossible for the teachers there to teach like here. The textbooks that are used in China were read first by teachers in English before teachers teach the students in Chinese. [I-ST4]

According to II-ST1, university education in Hong Kong was more advanced than mainland China. Studying in Hong Kong would open doors for future study and job opportunities after graduation.

The reason why I came to Hong Kong is because the university education of Hong Kong is fully in English, and it is linked directly with international market. After my graduation, I hope I can have a better future. My expectations were that after three years of studying in Hong Kong my English would be better and I could more easily go overseas to continue my study. [II-ST1]

The courses in Hong Kong universities were taught in English and this was very important to Participants I-ST2, I-ST3, II-ST1 and II-ST2. They thought that they could improve their English in Hong Kong and make many international friends as Hong Kong attracts people from all over the world and there were 500 international students attending this University.

In Hong Kong, there are more opportunities to be taught by lecturers who have international reputations in their particular research areas, whereas this is not the case in China. Examples of this in Business were indicated by II-ST6, in Logistics by I-ST2, and Biology by I-ST3. II-ST6 indicated that the teaching of Marketing in Hong Kong was better than in the mainland:

I like the Marketing here, as I think that this subject is better than the one in the mainland. The teaching material is practical and lecturers are of better quality.  
[II-ST6]

As illustrated in the above sections, students' reasons for choosing Hong Kong involved not only the social and economic situations of the mainland and Hong Kong, but also individual needs and family situations. This study suggests that for mainland students, Hong Kong offers many attractions and future opportunities. Hong Kong is affordable, a bridge between the East and the West, has more respected teaching and learning resources than the mainland, and offers opportunities to improve English language skills. Hong Kong is also in reasonable proximity to the mainland, which still allows students to visit their families in the mainland while in school.

## **4.5 Living Experiences of Mainland Chinese Students in Hong Kong**

All fifteen participants in Group I and Group II indicated that they had difficulty while studying and living in Hong Kong, especially in studying. These difficulties were at three levels: *societal*, *institutional* and *educational*. This section targets difficulties at the *societal* and *institutional* levels, which are linked to mainland students' living experiences in Hong Kong and the following section (4.6) analyses difficulties at the *educational* (classroom) level, which is linked to studying experiences.

### **4.5.1 Societal Level**

#### **4.5.1.1 Cultural differences**

Ten of the participants believed that there were major cultural differences between Hong Kong and the mainland. The participants had varying perspectives on these cultural differences and how they affected them. II-ST4 thought that Hong Kong was a high-speed city and in mainland China people were not so efficient. After passing Lo Wu Bridge, which links Hong Kong to Shenzhen, people's steps appeared to slow down, as II-ST4 described:

When we came to Hong Kong, we felt lost as we had no advantages at all compared to Hong Kong students: our English is not as good as Hong Kong students; our families' financial background is not as good as Hong Kong students' families; our grades are not so good either compared to Hong Kong students. The mainland

students feel very hard, they have never learned anything about Business or Accounting in China, they don't have any experiences about Business. [II-ST4]

Hong Kong is a small place but many languages are spoken. This is different from mainland China where only Putonghua is used. English, Cantonese, Putonghua, and many more are commonly used in Hong Kong as it is an international city. Hong Kong people could speak English and write in both English and in Chinese. According to II-ST4, the social status between Hong Kong people and mainlanders was also strikingly different:

The big environment of Hong Kong is different: our relationship is one of dominant and dominated. In China we are masters of the country, we play a big role; here we are guests, we only play a small part. [II-ST4]

These cultural differences contribute to the difficulty that students had integrating into Hong Kong culture. Most participants (I-ST1, I-ST2, I-ST3, I-ST4, I-ST7, II-ST1, II-ST3, II-ST4, II-ST5 and II-ST6) believed that there were extreme cultural differences between Hong Kong students and mainland students. The cultural differences caused communication barriers. Most mainland students expressed their difficulty in communicating with Hong Kong students:

In fact I like to be together with the mainland students, we go out together and we have things in common. With Hong Kong students, it is very superficial; nothing is deep due to the cultural differences. [I-ST1]

These participants (I-ST1, I-ST7, II-ST5, II-ST4) were not satisfied with their integration with Hong Kong. Their dissatisfaction was based on not having enough contact with Hong Kong students, lack of contact with Hong Kong society, not having time or money to go out to meet people, and not participating in enough campus activities. They all indicated their desire to integrate with Hong Kong society more in the future, especially if they decided to stay and work in Hong Kong after their graduation. II-ST5 said:

I am not quite satisfied in the following points: I don't get much contact with Hong Kong students. I don't have any contact with the society. If I could get more contact with the society, it would be helpful to my future development in Hong

Kong, but I don't have much time, and I am too passive, not active at all. It depends on our personality. [II-ST5]

Other difficulties include having a small living circle. At the beginning we only got along with the mainland students especially in the Foundation Year. Sometimes I was feeling very bored, there were not many programmes, not many activities. I only stayed in my room staring at the computer. [II-ST5]

#### **4.5.1.2      *Double language hurdles***

For those who were not from Guangdong Province, Cantonese language caused a big barrier. Even though Putonghua and Cantonese are both Chinese dialects, the form is identical only in writing. Oral communication is not comprehensible between the two dialects. Seven of the fifteen participants in Group I and Group II considered language hurdles as their major issue as they only spoke Putonghua. In Hong Kong all classes were taught in English but communication among classmates was in Cantonese. Some of the resulting challenges included difficulty understanding lectures and the textbooks and not being able to participate in student activities. More than one participant expressed this:

If we can overcome the difficulty of the languages, we can adjust to living in Hong Kong very well. In their society people speak better Putonghua than in university. If I go outside, I only need to use Putonghua. In study, English is the biggest problem.

[II-ST1]

When I go out, I don't understand Cantonese and I have difficulty talking to people.

[I-ST5]

Even reading street signs was a challenge, as Hong Kong follows different systems of translating and spelling street names in English. Sometimes street names have nothing to do with their Chinese meanings; for example, Ken Road in English would be written as *Jian* Road (堅道) in Chinese. Hong Kong students were used to this system, but for mainland Chinese students this was a source of confusion.

Eleven of the participants (I-ST2, I-ST3, I-ST4, I-ST5, I-ST6, I-ST7; II-ST1, II-ST3, II-ST5, II-ST6, II-ST7) responded that language was the biggest barrier to integration. It was often frustrating for the Chinese students to communicate in English. II-ST3 stated:

At the beginning it was very difficult to communicate with people due to language barriers. Our English wasn't good; it was difficult to talk in English. When we were using Putonghua to talk to other people, they couldn't understand us. In Cantonese we couldn't say a word or understand a word. We didn't want to communicate in English. [II-ST3]

Non-Cantonese speakers were forced to use two unfamiliar languages: Cantonese for living and English for studying. Generally speaking Hong Kong students did not understand Putonghua and mainland students did not understand Cantonese. Most of the time they communicated in English. It was embarrassing to see Chinese from Hong Kong and Chinese from the mainland communicating in English – when both groups were Chinese.

Participants I-ST3, I-ST5, I-ST6, II-ST1, II-ST3, II-ST5, II-ST6, II-ST8 explained that if they wanted to stay in Hong Kong after they graduated, they needed to mix more with Hong Kong students, integrate better into Hong Kong society and participate in more activities on campus. Many believed that mixing with Hong Kong students could improve their Cantonese skills and expose them to more experiences:

Being integrated more or less relates to my future development. If I want to stay in Hong Kong, I would like to integrate more into this society. If I go away to another country, I think I am integrated enough, and don't want to integrate more. Now I haven't decided yet what to do next. [I-ST3]

II-ST5 echoed the same feeling:

If I want to continue to stay in Hong Kong after my graduation, I would like to integrate more. I would like to make more friends, so they can tell me more about Hong Kong and I can improve my Cantonese. [II-ST5]

II-ST7 explained that there were many advantages of mixing with Hong Kong students:

The advantages are: they can introduce me to some places in Hong Kong. They tell me some information about living in Hong Kong and where to find good places for shopping. They will give me a lot of help. [II-ST7]

#### ***4.5.1.3 Financial stress***

Hong Kong is a very expensive city compared with the mainland and many mainland students are under financial stress. This has implications for their socialising, as they cannot afford to go out often. This was expressed by I-ST7:

If I had a job here, everything would not be a problem, but now I need to depend on the salary in China, my parents give me money and I live in Hong Kong, therefore I need to spend money carefully on living and on study. Here I am more careful in using money. In China very few people can get scholarships, now I get a partial scholarship in Hong Kong, which is not enough to pay my tuition. I need to pay \$40,000 per year to pay for 5 courses. Of course this money was available before I came, but I think that I need to have a good result as I have paid so much. [I-ST7]

According to II-ST4, a small number of mainland students depended on a full scholarship, and another group of mainland students received a partial scholarship which was only enough to pay tuition. Most mainland students were self-financed and normally had a financially strong family. \$100,000HKD per year is a big financial burden for many Chinese families, and the expectations from their families are often very high.

#### ***4.5.1.4 Discrimination***

Four participants (I-ST2, II-ST1, II-ST4, II-ST6) felt they were discriminated against by Hong Kong people. Although this discrimination was subtle, the staff reacted differently to the Hong Kong students and the mainland students.

On the surface there is no discrimination as the mainland students are often better in studies. Hong Kong people look down upon mainland people in general as mainland people don't line up and they don't seem polite. [II-ST1]

There is some kind of discrimination against mainland students. In one case, there was some sign of discrimination. One day in the class, the teacher asked the

question to the class: "Do you know which country's cars are the cheapest"? Some students answered: "China. Their cars can only run 100 meters and they will crash". The teacher answered: "It is Korea who makes the cheapest cars". For students to say that, they showed that they didn't like Chinese products. [I-ST2]

II-ST4 agreed that there was some discrimination but it was not so obvious. He indicated that the words Hong Kong people used might show some discrimination:

For example, there are some courses offered by the university. The examples and the words the teachers use are quite awkward. Most mainland students come from good families. Once in a class, we were talking about the taxes in the countryside and in the cities of China, and the teacher gave a few examples of taxes, such as paying taxes when people get married in China or they need to pay taxes even when they send pigs to butchers. [II-ST4]

II-ST6 thought that staff used a different attitude towards Hong Kong students compared with mainland students:

I feel that the staff here are nice to Hong Kong students but quite cold towards us. This shows from their attitude. Sometimes when we ask questions to teachers, teachers just respond lightly, because this is only part of their responsibility, but their attitude is different when they respond to Hong Kong students. [II-ST6]

On the other hand, nine participants (I-ST3, I-ST5, I-ST6, I-ST7, II-ST2, II-ST3, II-ST5, II-ST7, II-ST8) disagreed on this and did not feel any discrimination. II-ST3 believed that the discrimination came from society in general and not necessarily from the university. However, mainland students said that they were disadvantaged and some activities were only available for Hong Kong students. When they applied for these activities, they were rejected without reasons. In many university committees mainland students were underrepresented. I-ST3 said:

In university there are many programmes only available to Hong Kong students, such as voluntary work, and many other activities arranged by university and activities in the society. We came to Hong Kong to try different kinds of experiences and we want to participate in different kinds of activities. I want to do

volunteer work and I have applied for many posts, but I have been rejected by all of them. This is unexpected. [I-ST3]

#### **4.5.2 Institutional Level**

##### **4.5.2.1 Different mentality and different interests**

Participants I-ST7, II-ST1, II-ST3, II-ST6, II-ST8 saw the Hong Kong people as having different attitudes, values and interests. II-ST6 described Hong Kong people as short-sighted and materialistic:

Hong Kong students are looking for what to eat and where to eat, and the objective of education is just to find a job and look for money. The goals for the future are different for mainland students who want to make a great career and create a better future for themselves. [II-ST6]

The attitude to education seemed different. The participants felt that while Hong Kong people had good social skills, mainland students focused more on studying and had longer-term goals. I-ST2 stated:

There are differences between Hong Kong and mainland students, including their attitude towards life, the purpose of study and their living schedule. There are cultural differences as well. This can be a problem for some students, but for me it is OK. Hong Kong students and mainland students think differently, appreciate different things, and their attitude towards life is different, therefore communication is difficult. [I-ST2]

The differences in language and cultural values presented challenges for mainland students in building relationships with Hong Kong students. Participant II-ST5 stated:

The first year was smooth but the big problem is about relationships. I know some friends who often take flights to go back to China to see their boyfriends or girlfriends. We don't like to make boyfriends or girlfriends with Hong Kong people as we don't have feelings for them. The boys aren't high quality. It's only good to be a normal friend, not a boy friend. [II-ST5]



Another challenge to building relationships was the fact that Hong Kong female students had already formed social circles in secondary school or in the first year of university. This put the mainland students at a disadvantage in trying to break into those existing social circles.

Based on the data generated from interviews, many Hong Kong students have a different attitude towards money. During the period of this study, Hong Kong students were able to work freely in Hong Kong while mainland students could not have a work permit to work in Hong Kong. Therefore, Hong Kong students were in control of their own money and their spending habits differed from the mainland students who were supported by their parents or were on scholarships:

The mainland students depend on their family to support their study in Hong Kong and they are not allowed to work and get paid, so we don't have any work experiences, but we would like to have it. [II-ST4]

This difference in attitude towards money was seen as the second most important reason, after language, why mainland students did not integrate easily with the Hong Kong students. II-ST2 said:

The financial side can be a problem as Hong Kong students spend money more easily than we do. The total expense per year is about \$80,000HKD to \$90,000HKD which includes \$40,000HKD for tuition, \$30,000HKD for living and \$12,000HKD for accommodation. This is very expensive for me. [II-ST2]

The mainland students felt that Hong Kong students held a different attitude towards life and this did not make it easy for them to socialise with the Hong Kong students.

Hong Kong people are practical. Mainland people are quite romantic; we look for cultural excitement. We are changed little by little. Hong Kong people's romance is established on money. I feel that I should keep my advantages and not give up my own interests. [II-ST4]

There are some cultural differences: Hong Kong students are sensitive to what is popular at the moment, but they are not interested in literature and culture; they care more about their hair style and their clothes. They don't like reading much, so there

is nothing inside. There are many Chinese words that Hong Kong students don't know how to write. They can hardly write any complete sentences. They are very superficial. There are lots of differences from the cultural point of view between us. [II-ST5]

It was less stressful for the mainland students to spend their extra time with each other since they shared the same language, attitude to money, interests and values. I-ST7 indicated:

I often go out with mainland students because with Hong Kong students I don't share the same language. For just ordinary communication it's all right, but it's very difficult to have further communication. [I-ST7]

#### ***4.5.2.2 Different personalities***

Four participants (I-ST3, I-ST6, II-ST3, II-ST8) indicated that the different personalities of Hong Kong students made it difficult to make friends. One of the significant differences was that Hong Kong females were very independent (I-ST3). This is reflected in how they handle money and share expenses when they go out with their boyfriends. I-ST3 said:

Normally mainland students make friends with mainland students. It's not suitable for mainland male students to make friends with Hong Kong female students. Normally in China students start to have friends at Year 2. Hong Kong male students are friendly and they like mainland female students. Due to the different personalities of Hong Kong students and mainland students it's very difficult to make friends between mainland students and Hong Kong students. [I-ST3]

II-ST3 also shared the same feeling. He stated many differences between Hong Kong students and mainland students:

People here are very superficial. They promise things but they don't really do it. They always say they want to improve their English and Putonghua, but they don't put in any effort to improve them. They can have a lot of imagination but they

don't put this into practice. They are not ambitious, they don't want to make progress and they are not interested in learning. [II-ST3]

#### ***4.5.2.3 Different time management***

Three participants (I-ST1, II-ST8, II-ST7) indicated that Hong Kong students had different living habits from mainland students, making it difficult for mainland and Hong Kong students to share dorm rooms.

We can't accept Hong Kong students living habits, they get up late and sleep late; Hong Kong students do part-time jobs. Mainland students are not allowed to do work. Hong Kong students don't study in the room but we normally study in the room. If we share the room with Hong Kong students we would disturb each other. [I-ST6]

In Hong Kong under the influence of other students in the Hall, we go to sleep very late around 2:00-3:00 am and get up very late. If we have morning classes, we get up early to catch the classes. If we don't have classes, we just sleep in. While I was in China, all students needed to get up early and sleep early. It was a good schedule. [II-ST1]

Time management was also different. According to the mainland students, they were busy from the beginning to the end of the semester but Hong Kong students were busy only at the last minute to prepare for the exams. Mainland students claim they studied more steadily than Hong Kong students:

Mainland students work efficiently. Work which should be finished within one hour would take a much longer time if we work together with Hong Kong female students. [II-ST6]

II-ST5 agreed on this:

When I go shopping, I only go with mainland students. When I do project or group work, if teachers put me together with Hong Kong students, I have to do it with them. I don't want to play or mix with them too much as my GPA is below the requirement. They play all the time and their study habits are bad. [II-ST5]

I-ST4 agreed that Hong Kong people had a bad concept of time. Their time was often fully booked and they walked fast, but quite often they were very late, especially for meetings and classes. They stayed up late at night to study and were often tired the next day.

#### ***4.5.2.4 Difficulties in adjusting to the new living environment***

When mainland students came to Hong Kong, most of them had difficulty adjusting to the new environment. Reasons for this included homesickness and loneliness, food, weather and different living habits. II-ST5 from the Electrical Engineering Department summed it up in this statement:

At the beginning I thought that eating is very expensive here, but now it's getting better. I didn't think about these things carefully. I was very optimistic so I didn't take these as problems. Some of us couldn't get used to things here but now they are alright. In my first year we had 150 mainland students, but now some of them have gone back to China. Some left because of their bad grades; for some people it is because of homesickness as they felt it was too far from home; for others it is because they couldn't get along with their classmates. We have many hours of classes per week, our department has the second fullest workload in this university.

[II-ST5]

Three of the participants, I-ST3, II-ST4, II-ST5, said that loneliness was the main challenge to living in Hong Kong. This was their first time away from home and they were anxious that they would not be able to cope on their own. Several students reported homesickness:

At the beginning I was like a child, I would cry. At that time my roommate was not here and I was miserable. Later on my roommate came and so did other people, I could go out with them and I got to know a lot of people. [I-ST3]

I feel homesick: I have never left home for so long. I go home every two weeks and on holidays. [II-ST4]

I think it's difficult to fit in because of our difficulty with English. It is difficult as I said before, especially living conditions: I am not quite used to the living here, but

little by little I get changed by the environment. For homesickness: I have never left home for so long. I go home every two weeks and on holidays. [II-ST5]

The other 12 participants did not mention loneliness or homesickness. This study did not probe further as to whether they did not have this feeling or they did not want to speak about it.

Three participants from northern China (I-ST3, I-ST7, II-ST7) expressed difficulties adjusting to the weather and the food, often with physical consequences:

It was too hot and humid, so I often had a rash. I didn't like the food here, but now I am used to it. [I-ST3]

I-ST7 and II-ST7 indicated that adapting to the different food was a great difficulty:

I think the most difficult thing for mainland students is food. We are not used to the food here. We can't eat well; everything is the same taste, nothing else. [I-ST7]

Some students are not used to the food here. There are too few vegetables. People from the North don't like the taste here, the food is too light for them, so they don't like it. Little by little, our health is not so good. We get sick easily and are very tired all the time, which is not good. We are not energetic in class. This affects our study. [II-ST7]

What I eat here is not nutritious, big quantity of food, but not high quality. It's very expensive so I just try to finish all my food and don't waste any. [II-ST8]

The canteen's food in the Hall is very bad, but most mainland students eat there. The food is not good and not cheap. Most people there are mainland students. They don't cook on their own. The canteen of the Hall is much worse than the canteen in university. There is not much choice. The regular cost is \$20 for a meal, some meals are at special price of \$16. In China it is only 2 or 3 yuan per meal. [II-ST3]

For students (I-ST1, II-ST2, II-ST4) from Guangdong Province, living in Hong Kong was similar to their home lifestyle, but for those who came from other parts of China, Hong Kong was very different.

#### ***4.5.2.5 Independence and self-discipline***

A major adjustment for mainland students was the expectation that they become independent and develop a sense of self-discipline. For the first time in their lives, parents were not available to take care of the students' needs. The following responses from participants II-ST5, II-ST3 and II-ST4 indicate the difficulty they faced in developing their own coping strategies:

Back home my parents used to cook for me, wash clothes for me, manage the bank account for me, pay phone bills for me. Here self-discipline is very important. Everything needs to be planned by ourselves. [II-ST5]

Here self-discipline is very important. It's easy to waste money to buy things we don't like or don't need. It gives me a lot of pressure inside. We need to have time control. On study we need to know how to find information by ourselves, we need to understand things we learn, manage our time to do what we need to do. Training myself to be self-controlled and self-disciplined is very difficult. [II-ST3]

I feel myself quite flexible now, not like before when I was so passive. Now I have better self-management ability. My schedule is not fixed. Sometimes I start a day at 8:30 am, sometimes I have a day-off, and sometimes I have classes in the afternoon. The result is my biological clock is mixed up. My schedule is not so regular, and there are a lot of other attractions. In China my life was very regular. [II-ST4]

The above sections analysed societal and institutional difficulties. The cultural and environmental differences between Hong Kong and the mainland are the most prominent difficulties. This research reveals that living experiences impact education in many ways, but the latter also brings independent challenges. The following section will examine difficulties experienced by mainland students in their studies.

## **4.6 Educational Experiences of Mainland Chinese Students in Hong Kong**

This section examines the study experiences of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong. The focus of this section is on the classroom, including learning and teaching. The data on students' difficulties relating to studying can be organised into five categories: stress from study, different learning styles, difficulty with English language, cooperation skills and different teaching styles.

### **4.6.1 *Stress from Study***

Three participants (I-ST1, I-ST2, II-ST8) described the stress that their studies created. II-ST8, a Business student, indicated that study in Hong Kong was not as easy as she had expected. She felt that she was not adequately prepared in secondary school for the university course and felt pressured to work harder and longer hours than the Hong Kong students. The language problem added to the stress of studying, as she explained:

Mainland students are very shy and would not speak up. In class they don't ask questions or answer questions. In tutorials mainland students rarely ask questions, as we are afraid that our questions seem too simple. We need to conquer psychological barriers first. Mainland students needed to spend long hours, maybe 30 hours per week, to memorise and to understand our classes while Hong Kong students didn't read much and they only go to the library just before the exams and they read for a long time. [II-ST8]

The main reason for the stress, according to II-ST8, also a Business student, is because mainland students were disadvantaged:

Mainland students are disadvantaged compared with Hong Kong students: What was learned in the secondary school in mainland China is not helpful for preparing us for the university in Hong Kong but Hong Kong students had a better preparation before they came to university as they had learned Business in secondary school; Hong Kong students had sound knowledge on Business and they know a lot, but the mainland students did not know much about Business, such as stocks, companies'

brands, the strategies of some companies. This knowledge was very new for mainland students. [II-ST8]

I-ST1 also felt that his biggest stress came from study:

In general I feel that there is more pressure here. The pressure comes from study, every week we need to submit some reports, assignments, or homework. [I-ST1]

If students received poor grades, they ran the risk of being expelled. I-ST2 said:

Some Chinese students whose GPA (grade point average) was not satisfactory – below 2.0 in average, were sent back home by the University. This was to follow the university rule as it is stated on the students' handbook that if the average GPA was 2.0, the student need to be deregistered. [I-ST2]

Students in applied Biology (I-ST3, I-ST4, II-ST2) thought that the teachers in this department were more demanding, thus increasing their level of stress. A somewhat tangential factor, which nevertheless had an impact, was the advanced equipment and technology that the students had to learn how to use.

There is a lot of homework. From the middle to the end of each semester, we are very busy. Here the university is for three years and in China it is for four years. The equipment is very advanced. The laboratory has high technology. My friends in university back home told me that their study there was easy. [I-ST4]

II-ST2 agreed that study in their department of Biology was particularly hard:

At the beginning teachers were speaking really fast in class. I had to take a lot of notes and pay attention to what I needed to do after class. Since I had to take notes in class, and I had difficulties understanding the English spoken during the class.

[II-ST2]

#### **4.6.2 Different Learning Style**

The difference in the traditional learning styles of mainland students compared with those of Hong Kong also made studying difficult. Self-learning is the norm in Hong Kong, whereas in mainland China, learning is heavily structured and the teacher instructs the



student to a greater extent. In China students live in a close circle, they take frequent exams, have heavy homework loads and the standards are high. Studying more independently in Hong Kong, however, is a challenge for mainland students who are used to having their schedules fixed for them. Managing their own time is equally challenging. Several students discussed the two different education systems in Hong Kong and in the mainland.

In Zhejiang, the education was completely different from Hong Kong and it was a different system. The courses were taught in Chinese, and they were no different from secondary school. We just needed to do homework and some revision for exams. We selected some courses related to my major including zoology, Biology, chemistry, mathematics; some general courses, such as English, arts, history of arts and film criticism. In this university, we need to study on our own. [I-ST3]

In Hong Kong each semester is short. There is a lot of homework. From the middle to the end of each semester, we are very busy. Here the university is for three years and in China it is for four years. [I-ST4]

Here we have the freedom to set up our programme. We have free choices for courses and set up our own timetable. In China the courses are fixed by the university and we have very limited choice. In China secondary schools are different from universities. Teachers are very responsible. [I-ST5]

The differences in learning style involved difficulty with the language and different cooperation skills. These themes are presented below in the following sections.

#### ***4.6.3 Difficulty with English Language***

English was considered to be the most difficult barrier to conquer, both for living and studying, as indicated by many participants (I-ST1, I-ST3, I-ST4, II-ST1, II-ST4, II-ST5, II-ST7). The difficulty of English presented itself in different aspects of studying:

I find English the most difficult when I need to communicate with teachers or classmates. [II-ST4]

At the beginning I had difficulty listening to English. Hong Kong teachers could teach in English first and if we had difficulty, they would explain once more in Cantonese. Non-Chinese teachers can only teach in English, if we couldn't understand, we just went home to find more books to read. [I-ST1]

English is the most difficult: I had difficulty in all four skills at the beginning: speaking, listening, reading and writing. [II-ST2]

II-ST2 agreed that study in their department was particularly hard. She felt that other Hong Kong students had better English skills, and this caused even more challenges:

The most difficult for me is the difference between me and Hong Kong students. We are in the Business school. Hong Kong students have better English. I was considered to be strong in English while I was in China, but when I compare myself with Hong Kong students, I found they had better English. [II-ST2]

#### **4.6.4 Cooperation Skills**

According to the participants II-ST4, I-ST1, I-ST5, II-ST1, cooperation and collaboration are important to students in Hong Kong. This is not the case in China, where students work independently; these participants felt that team work was emphasized in Hong Kong. Communicating in the same team meant that both Hong Kong and mainland students had to improve their language skills.

Here the cooperation is very important. In mainland universities they only need to go to the library and study on their own in order to get good marks, but in Hong Kong it's impossible. Here we need collaboration with other students. It doesn't work if we do things on our own. Group activities make up the biggest part of the total grade. Presentations and discussions are also very important. [II-ST4]

The education is better here. The university emphasises team work. Many activities need to be done in groups. We work together with other students, find documents together and write reports afterwards. [I-ST1]

#### **4.6.5    *Different Teaching Style***

All fifteen participants indicated that teaching methods in Hong Kong were different from those in the mainland. They believed that the teaching material was more practical in Hong Kong than in mainland China. In Hong Kong the students are expected to review and reflect upon what is taught in class by reading several books as homework. Students need to spend time in the library researching and studying. In China each course only has one textbook. Students are required only to know this book and do all the exercises in it in order to pass the course. Additional differences in teaching methods involved the following: teaching in English, memorisation, and different lecturers. Each of these is briefly elaborated below.

Memorisation is still the teaching method used by some lecturers and students in Hong Kong, but many participants (I-ST4, I-ST6, II-ST6, II-ST3) indicated that they did not like memorising.

For the exams, we just need to memorise things, we don't need to understand anything. Before I used to study science and engineering and I needed to understand the reasons not just memorise the notes. Now I feel it is very mechanical. These difficulties are quite significant as they will affect my study.

[II-ST3]

Studying Business involves both reading and memorising. I don't like to memorise.

[I-ST6]

We need to make Business plans. I don't like memorising but I can get good grades anyway. I think practice is very important. Students need to memorise a lot. 90% depends on memory. [II-ST6]

Three participants (I-ST1, I-ST2, I-ST7) indicated the differences between lecturers in Hong Kong and in mainland China. In their opinion lecturers in Hong Kong were mostly hardworking and friendly, but lecturers in mainland China were not so approachable. They saw their lecturers in Hong Kong as approachable, modest, unassuming and willing to help students. Some lecturers in Hong Kong demonstrated high quality teaching skills and technical knowledge and were internationally famous in their fields.

In class in Hong Kong, all lecturers are very friendly: They are not like in China where all lecturers are so difficult to reach, they are supercilious and haughty mannered, not like ordinary people. After I came here, I found out that there are a lot of lecturers here who are very famous worldwide, but they are so modest and unassuming, just like ordinary people, they give people a feeling that they are approachable. [I-ST7]

Teachers are good, they have a high level of teaching quality and their technical knowledge is advanced. They are friendly and willing to help students. We can easily communicate with teachers. The quality of teaching is better than in China. The level of lecturers here is higher than the lecturers in China. [I-ST1]

In China universities emphasise theoretical study. Sometimes teachers don't pay much attention to teaching. They use the classroom time talking about other personal matters; they don't appreciate teaching much, because the evaluation of teachers is based on publications and research. Students are not important for teachers. While in Hong Kong, teachers teach more practical matters, especially in the subject of Business; practical knowledge is very important. They don't just teach knowledge, they train the students' problem solving abilities and how to socialise with different kinds of people. [I-ST2]

However, one participant reported negative experiences with Hong Kong lecturers:

Before I came here my teacher had told me that the teachers here in Hong Kong came from all over the world; after I came here I was disappointed. They have a strong accent, and their English is not good. [II-ST6]

II-ST6 believed that the relationship between students and lecturers played an important role in Hong Kong:

We used to believe that our grades would all depend on the real scores; in fact this was not true. Many cases depended on the relationship between teachers and students. Not all teachers are so fair. If a student gets along with teachers, he/she can get good grades. [II-ST6]

II-ST6 also found that the placement for internships depended on student-teacher relationships. Those students favoured by teachers could seek internships in the US, Europe and other countries, but those who were not had no choice but to go to China or to stay in Hong Kong. II-ST6 was the only participant who felt disappointed about going to Hong Kong. He indicated that he had many bad experiences while living and studying there. The researcher could not discern whether II-ST6's feelings were commonly held, or if they were only his opinion because he did not do well in his studies in Hong Kong and he needed to repeat the Foundation Year. All other fourteen participants indicated they were generally happy with their experiences in Hong Kong even though there was some dissatisfaction.

## **4.7 Summary**

The interview data revealed several challenges facing mainland Chinese students while living and studying in Hong Kong. These challenges can be placed into four categories: financial burdens; language barriers, teaching/learning differences and the existence of cultural barriers. The financial burdens are an added stress particularly for the several students who are self-financed. Those who are not self-financed feel not only the financial pressure but also the added stress of having to perform well academically or lose their scholarships. In addition, mainland students would like to find part-time work in Hong Kong, because living expenses are so high and working would enable them to socialise in their present community and to prepare them for finding a job easily after graduation. However, they are at a disadvantage due to language barriers in the workplace and in Hong Kong society in general. Hong Kong is an international community where it is very helpful if students are fluent in at least two of three languages, specifically Cantonese, Putonghua and English.

The cultural barriers are significant. The students have to face differences in attitudes, relationships, traditions, customs, and even learning/teaching. The students from mainland China have come from a culture that is diverse and has many subcultures. In Hong Kong, they feel that they are living in a different country. In addition, they feel the stress and rigors of their academic undertaking, some with limited financial resources, all with a limited degree of language proficiency while being expected to perform in multiple

languages. They also feel socially isolated from their own culture, alienated by lack of resources, and limited in their ability to establish social connections in Hong Kong.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FINDINGS (II) - STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY MAINLAND CHINESE STUDENTS AND THEIR FUTURE PLANS AFTER GRADUATION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This Chapter is the second part of the findings and covers research questions RQ3 and RQ4, and also Specific Research Questions 5-7, as stated below:

**(RQ3)** How do mainland Chinese students adapt to living and studying in Hong Kong?

**SRQ 5** In what ways do mainland Chinese students adapt to living in Hong Kong?

**SRQ 6** In what ways do mainland Chinese students adapt to studying in Hong Kong?

**(RQ4)** What future plans, if any, do the mainland Chinese students have after graduation in Hong Kong?

**SRQ7** What plans do Mainland Chinese students have after graduation in Hong Kong?

The purposes of this chapter are, firstly, to reveal the range of strategies mainland students adopt to ensure successful adaptation to living and studying in Hong Kong, and secondly to learn the students' future plans after graduation in Hong Kong. The study discovers that even though the difficulties met by Group I (students in their first year in Hong Kong) and Group II (students in Hong Kong more than one year) were similar, their strategies of adaptation varied depending on how long they had been in Hong Kong.

This Chapter begins by illustrating the strategies adopted by mainland Chinese students to living in Hong Kong (Section 5.2). This is followed by a section illustrating the strategies adopted by mainland Chinese students to studying in Hong Kong (Section 5.3). The final part of this chapter (Section 5.4) discusses the future plans of mainland Chinese

students after graduation, analysing their options and presenting reasons why most of them prefer to remain in Hong Kong. This chapter will also present the strategies mainland Chinese students use to prepare for their future plans.

## **5.2 Strategies Adopted by Mainland Chinese Students to Living in Hong Kong**

As stated in Chapter 4, mainland Chinese students' difficulties in Hong Kong principally involve cultural differences, double language hurdles, financial stress, discrimination, different mentalities and interests, different personalities, different time management, difficulties adjusting to the new living environment, and different approaches to independence and self-discipline. Groups I and II shared many strategies to adapt to living in Hong Kong, but on some issues they had differences. The participants from Group II indicated that during the first year they had put all their time and effort into their studies, as academic pressure was their main source of stress. However, during their second year they started to do things differently. They spent more time socialising, according to II-ST2, II-ST3, II-ST4, II-ST7 and II-ST8.

The focus of the first year students was different from the second year students both in their strategies for living and for studying. During their first year it was important to focus on learning the language and adjusting to being independent. By the time they reached their second year, the students had learned more of the language and culture, and were more confident to develop closer relationships with the Hong Kong students. They participated in more organisations and activities organised by the University. This allowed them to be more open to socialising with and learning from the Hong Kong students in regard to managing their environment and developing different study skills and habits. The second year students were therefore more relaxed.

In order to successfully face these difficulties, the strategies adopted by mainland students included conquering the communication barrier by learning Cantonese, integrating with Hong Kong students, improving self-management skills, participating in different activities, and promoting Putonghua and Chinese culture on campus. The following sections will analyse these issues separately.



### **5.2.1 *Conquering the Communication Barrier by Learning Cantonese***

Participants in Group I and Group II all indicated that the main barrier for communicating with Hong Kong students was language, even though there were other factors that blocked communication, such as different values and differences in time management, as discussed previously. Hong Kong students could not speak Putonghua and mainland students could not speak Cantonese. Participants I-ST4 and I-ST5 suggested that being able to speak Cantonese could diminish the differences between Hong Kong and mainland students. Participant I-ST4 recommended that mainland students should buy some tapes in Cantonese before going to Hong Kong, which would help prepare them to make progress in Cantonese while living there. Participant I-ST5 suggested using the Internet to learn Cantonese and make friends with Hong Kong students:

I took some steps to improve my Cantonese. I learned Cantonese after my arrival in Hong Kong. Now mainland students do a Foundation Year in Hong Kong, but they stay together with mainland students and do not mix with Hong Kong students. It is not so good for making progress in Cantonese. They should spend more time with Hong Kong students and make friends with Hong Kong students. [I-ST5]

I-ST5 suggested that in the Foundation Year, mainland students should try to take different courses such as Cantonese and Chinese Culture. All participants who could speak a little Cantonese, both in Group I and Group II, such as I-ST4, I-ST5, and three native Cantonese speakers I-ST1, II-ST2 and II-ST4, felt there were numerous advantages if mainland students could speak Cantonese in Hong Kong:

If you can speak Cantonese, Hong Kong students are willing to accept you. Now I can communicate in Cantonese about daily matters. Last year I couldn't speak Cantonese but Hong Kong students tried to communicate with me in Putonghua, and we could understand each other as well. [I-ST4]

However, language still remained a major barrier for Group II participants. Participants II-ST3 and II-ST8 agreed that speaking Cantonese was the best way to make friends with Hong Kong students:

Learning Cantonese was the best way to help you adjust to the environment here. Speaking Cantonese is the best way to make friends with Hong Kong students. Hong Kong people do not like those who were not willing to speak Cantonese and they look down upon those who refuse to speak Cantonese. Hong Kong students are normally friendly with those who are willing to speak Cantonese. Therefore it is important for the mainland students to be concerned about other people's feelings while living in Hong Kong. [II-ST3]

II-ST3 and II-ST8 shared the same opinion as participants in Group I on the importance of speaking Cantonese in Hong Kong. Among the other advantages of being able to speak Cantonese was that it would help in job seeking. While II-ST3 was looking for a job in Hong Kong he found that being able to speak Cantonese helped greatly.

### **5.2.2      *Integrating with Hong Kong Students***

Participants I-ST1, I-ST3 and I-ST7 suggested that integrating with Hong Kong students greatly helped their adjustment to Hong Kong. It not only honed their social and communication skills, it also helped with their studies:

I tried to ask questions about study to Hong Kong students, and discuss study matters with them. I would try hard to come to university to study with them together in groups. This helped a lot. On one hand I like to train my social and communication skills and on the other hand, it helps with my study. It is even better than just listening to teachers in class. The feeling is different. [I-ST1]

Three participants (I-ST1, I-ST3, and I-ST7) felt that at the beginning it was hard to integrate into the community of Hong Kong students as they didn't know each other, but fortunately Hong Kong students were friendly and they got along well after half a year. I-ST3 pointed out that at the beginning mainland students and Hong Kong students could only communicate with each other in English, but after a while mainland students improved their Cantonese and Hong Kong students took a compulsory course of Putonghua, and communication became easier.

First of all I need to conquer psychological problems. When I didn't like to speak Cantonese, they encouraged me to speak Cantonese. After a while they could speak

Putonghua to me as well. I feel that speaking Cantonese is the main difficulty we need to overcome when we communicate with Hong Kong people. In this way we can fit into their circle. [I-ST3]

Participants suggested that mainland students should participate as much as possible in the activities organised by the university and be with Hong Kong students as much as possible. I-ST3 pointed out the importance of participating in many activities:

At the beginning Hong Kong students normally wanted to invite mainland students to join their activities or to go out for some parties. If mainland students refused them, it would be difficult to have a second opportunity and Hong Kong students would think that mainland students did not like to be together with Hong Kong students and mainland students would not have the opportunity to fit into the Hong Kong circle again. [I-ST3]

I-ST1 explained that he took all the opportunities to integrate with Hong Kong students, such as playing basketball and volleyball together once or twice per week, and he also joined the university's Volleyball Association. I-ST7 also said that any activity for being together with Hong Kong students should not be rejected. There were many activities and parties in the residence hall as well, which were the best opportunities to get to know people. I-ST5 explained that at the beginning he couldn't understand Cantonese, but later on he participated in some activities and this helped with his Cantonese:

When I was doing projects and group work, I tried to work together with Hong Kong students. I try to work with different groups of Hong Kong students. If I only worked with the same Hong Kong students, I wouldn't be able to fit in so well.

[I-ST5]

Participants I-ST1, I-ST3, I-ST5, I-ST7, II-ST5, II-ST7 and II-ST8 all agreed that integrating with Hong Kong students not only helped them with adjusting to living and studying in Hong Kong but also helped them to improve their Cantonese. II-ST5 described her experiences in the second year:

Now I go out with both mainland students and Hong Kong students, but the feeling is different. Now when I am with Hong Kong students, I feel very relaxed and indulgent. Sometimes we go out at midnight and sometimes after class they ask me to go out and I go out with them. [II-ST5]

II-ST7 claimed that Hong Kong students, such as her roommate, could teach her good learning methods, and identify key points in her classes as they had many intelligent ways of preparing for exams. II-ST7 explains:

Hong Kong students helped me apply for the Hong Kong Identity Card. In the beginning, not being able to speak Cantonese or English and not knowing the streets of Hong Kong, I was often lost. My Hong Kong classmates accompanied me to the Immigration Office. In addition they were helpful in introducing me to many interesting places in Hong Kong and where to go for shopping. [II-ST7]

A few participants (II-ST1, II-ST3 and II-ST5) indicated that the experience of going out with Hong Kong students and mainland students was different. II-ST5 explained that she mainly went shopping with mainland students but did other things with Hong Kong students. II-ST1 indicated that her activities involved both Hong Kong and mainland students depending on the activity. She thought the cultural differences between Hong Kong students and mainland students sometimes made it difficult to go out with Hong Kong students:

For one example, Hong Kong students pay too much attention to money. They have different value on many things. Hong Kong is a business-oriented society and I am not used to this kind of atmosphere and I don't want to listen to some comments they made. When mainland students get together, we can talk about many other things, not just money. We can talk about study and about travel. [II-ST1]

Even though these participants (I-ST1, I-ST3, I-ST5, I-ST7, II-ST5, II-ST7 and II-ST8) indicated that they received lots of help from Hong Kong students, other participants declared that they mostly stayed with mainland students due to the language barrier, different interests and different concepts on value. In general, other than on some weekends and other public holidays, mainland students mixed very rarely with Hong Kong students.

### 5.2.3 *Improving Self-management Skills*

Concerning adjustment to the new living environment, some participants (like I-ST3, I-ST4 and I-ST7) suggested that taking good care of oneself was very important. They said that at home their parents took care of them, told them what to eat, what to wear, how to manage their schedule and their finances, but in Hong Kong they needed to take care of themselves. This was a big challenge and required time for adjustment.

I-ST3 indicated that each time after she had been home and came back to Hong Kong, she still needed some time to adjust to living in Hong Kong again:

Everyday I still need to take some tablets that my mother gave to me from the mainland to help me adjust to the climate and food in Hong Kong and I have to pay more attention to myself. [I-ST3]

For I-ST3, I-ST4 and I-ST7, settling in Hong Kong was not as easy as expected. Loneliness, climate, food, daily schedule and different holidays were part of the difficulties they met in the new environment. It took some time for them to acclimate to Hong Kong.

For mainland students to thrive in Hong Kong they had to develop self-discipline and become independent. Participants II-ST3, II-ST4, II-ST5, and II-ST7 described various ways they achieved this:

I can participate in many activities. In the beginning I didn't know anything, but now I can participate in many activities and make sure that my studies are still good, this is big progress. In China my parents gave me lots of affection and spoilt me and I didn't need to take care of anything. Now due to many factors I am obliged to do it all by myself. I feel I have made progress and I am very satisfied. [II-ST7]

II-ST5 also agreed that self-management and self-discipline were very important for the mainland students:

Here (in Hong Kong) self-discipline is very important. It's easy to waste money to buy things we don't like or don't need. It gives me a lot of pressure inside. We need to have time management. When studying we need to know how to find information

by ourselves, we need to understand things we learn, manage our time to do what we need to do. Teachers won't tell me when to do what. Training myself to be self-controlled and self-disciplined is very difficult. [II-ST5]

As Hong Kong is an expensive city, managing money was also a necessary skill. II-ST5 set up rules to discipline herself:

I collect all my bills and account statements each time I spend money, so I know how much I have used. I need to be rational when I do shopping. It happened that I bought something that I liked at that moment, but after that I never wore it more than once. I don't use credit cards. We need to learn from our experiences. [II-ST5]

II-ST4 indicated that time management skills were very important as the schedule was not fixed in Hong Kong. Sometimes classes started at 8:30 am, sometimes they would not start until the afternoon, and sometimes there was no class for the whole day. In China the schedule was fixed by the university and life was very regular:

In the University the well-planned schedule in China may not be very efficient. Here we plan our own time and we know what we need to do, so we can squeeze some time to go to the library. I feel I am quite flexible now. [II-ST4]

Many students had difficulty adjusting in the first year, but in the second year when other mainland students came and they got to know more people, life became easier.

#### **5.2.4 *Participating in Different Activities***

Four participants (I-ST1, I-ST2, II-ST1, II-ST3) indicated that the university in Hong Kong has been a great support to mainland students adjusting to the new environment. The SAO (Students Association Office), the departments, and the student hall organised many activities. I-ST1 and II-ST3 mentioned the High Table Dinner, which was a dinner function in the students Hall that all Hall residents were expected to attend and during which students could meet important people such as Hong Kong business people and some teachers.

Students can learn much that was not covered in the classroom. Other good programmes included the Buddy programme, English Presentation Association, PE clubs, Literature Club, etc. There were more than 30 different clubs on campus. These clubs not only helped mainland students get together with Hong Kong students, but also with international students who came from all over the world.  
[II-ST3]

I-ST1 also suggested that the High Table Dinner organised in the Hall was a good opportunity to make friends with Hong Kong students and others. In general the activities were seen as useful.

There were several other programmes set up to help students adjust. II-ST3 recommended the Mentorship Programme organised by the university. It was on a first come first serve policy and everyone could apply; but mainland students only knew about it through word-of-mouth. There was a Buddy Programme also, which set up a mainland student with a Hong Kong student to facilitate culture and language exchange.

II-ST1 stated that the Leadership and Competence for Success Programme (LCSP) was very impressive. I-ST2 also suggested that LCSP was very helpful in gaining leadership skills, learning how to deal with people, and building a support system:

The graduates of LCSP can join the University LCSP Alumni Association which aims at maintaining mutual support among members, consolidating leadership training, and serving the community. This programme is not common in China.

[I-ST2]

Eight participants (I-ST1, I-ST2, II-ST1, II-ST2, II-ST3, II-ST4, II-ST7 and II-ST8) mentioned the advantages of using the activities and services organised by the University.

The University provides many services. Now the University is making progress. In Hong Kong there are a lot of organisations that give us help and assistance. When we have requirements, we can ask for help. They are very friendly and helpful.

[II-ST4]

II-ST7 appreciated very much the different courses offered by the University to help mainland students, such as English and Cantonese courses:

The University has organised some courses for us. The first semester there were English and Cantonese. The biggest help that the University gave to us is to mix us with Hong Kong students. They treat us as equal as Hong Kong students. There is no barrier. We do all the activities together. I have heard that there was a Buddy Programme to pair up a mainland student with a Hong Kong student. [II-ST7]

Doing volunteer work was also a very good way to get to know Hong Kong and to meet people, according to II-ST7. Mainland universities did not offer volunteer programmes to students, but Hong Kong universities encouraged it. In summary, Group II learned to take advantage of the activities and services offered by the university and the opportunities that a better command of the language gave to them. Other than the above eight (I-ST1, I-ST2, II-ST1, II-ST2, II-ST3, II-ST4, II-ST7 and II-ST8) students, the rest of participants did not mention whether they did many after-class activities with Hong Kong students.

### **5.2.5        *Promoting Putonghua and Chinese Culture on Campus***

Participant II-ST2 recommended the Putonghua Club as an excellent opportunity to promote Putonghua on campus and to get along with Hong Kong students. Everyone was welcome to join the Putonghua Club and throughout the semester. There were excursions, Putonghua movies, Putonghua Week, and many other Putonghua-related activities, II-ST2 was selected as the chairperson of Putonghua Club in 2006-2007, and she described the club as follows:

The objectives of the Putonghua Club are to promote Putonghua and offer opportunities for Hong Kong students to practice Putonghua with mainland students.  
[II-ST2]

II-ST8 agreed that promoting Putonghua was a good strategy:

Promoting Putonghua in the entire university is a good way to bridge the cultural gap. It is important for the university to encourage all students to speak Putonghua. A



programme to promote Putonghua, like Big Mouth to promote English, could be helpful. [II-ST8]

Participants I-ST2, I-ST3 and I-ST5 also agreed that the Putonghua Club was a good opportunity to get to know Hong Kong students and to get acquainted with more senior mainland students:

Even though this is a programme among students to practice Putonghua, most members are Hong Kong students who are positive about learning and practicing Putonghua. This programme offered a good place to let Hong Kong students and mainland students help each other and exchange ideas in Cantonese and Putonghua.

[I-ST2]

II-ST4 was the Chairperson of the Mainland Students Association. This association aimed to help increase communication between mainland students and Hong Kong students through promoting Chinese culture in the University and organising various China-related activities, such as Chinese cooking classes, which interested many Hong Kong students. There were more than 800 members of this association, mostly mainland students. II-ST4 indicated:

While I am working on promoting Putonghua in the University, I need to talk to the President of the University, SAO (Students Association Office), AECO (Academic Exchange and Cooperation Office) in order to receive support. [II-ST4]

Participants in both groups shared similar opinions on the usefulness of promoting both Putonghua and the Chinese culture on campus and increasing communication between Hong Kong students and mainland students.

### **5.3 Strategies Adopted by Mainland Chinese Students to Studying in Hong Kong**

The data collected for this study show that the educational experiences of mainland students in Hong Kong include the following difficulties: stress from study, different learning styles, difficulties with English, different cooperation skills, and different teaching styles. To successfully face these difficulties, the strategies adapted by mainland Chinese students include the following: overcoming the English language difficulty, getting together with Hong Kong students, finding an efficient method of learning, and using the support from the University.

#### **5.3.1 *Overcoming the English Language Difficulty***

All participants in Group I and Group II indicated that English was their first and foremost difficulty, therefore conquering the English language difficulty was the first step to help them with their studies and to make them adjusted to studying environment in Hong Kong. They all had different strategies as illustrated by three participants (I-ST1, I-ST4, I-ST6). I-ST4 shared her experience of learning English in saying that AECO (now named the International Affairs Office) always paid a lot of attention to mainland students and gave them a lot of good advice about learning and senior students in each department were the best people to seek advice from. Her method for studying difficult words in English was as follows:

First of all I hold the books everyday and check dictionaries all the time. By repeating these words many times, they appear more familiar to me and I can remember them. [I-ST4]

Student I-ST1 also reflected on the difficulties of overcoming barriers to the learning of English:

I think I need to pay more attention to studying, and I need to listen carefully to the teacher at the lectures. At my first class, the teacher was speaking very well and very fast and I couldn't understand. At the beginning, I needed to do a lot of work

after classes to check the difficult words in dictionaries and in the electronic dictionary. Now it is getting much better. [I-ST1]

For I-ST6, his method of improving English was to talk to exchange students on campus:

Mainland students can communicate more with international students and practise English if they have time. Normally international students only stay here for half a year and they are willing to talk. [I-ST6]

There were about 500 foreign students from all over the world, not including mainland students, in this university. Mostly these foreign students were willing to get to know other cultures and to make friends with people from other places. That was one of the main purposes of going to Asia and opening up their view towards the outside world.

### **5.3.2      *Getting Along with Hong Kong Students***

Participants (I-ST1, I-ST4 and I-ST7; II-ST5, II-ST7 and II-ST8) indicated that getting along with Hong Kong students was very important. On one hand it could improve Cantonese speaking ability and social communication skills; on the other hand it could prepare mainland students for integrating into Hong Kong society. These skills would be particularly crucial if they wanted to stay in Hong Kong after their graduation. From a study viewpoint, participants felt that Hong Kong students were stronger in teamwork than the mainland students who felt that Hong Kong students were trained in this skill, whereas mainland students did not receive this kind of training. Therefore mainland students could learn collaborating skills from them. I-ST4 suggested that whenever she had difficulties studying, she would ask Hong Kong students to tell her the English words in Chinese:

Not only Hong Kong students can tell me these English words in Chinese, they can also explain them to me in Chinese. All mainland students in my department have difficulty in studying. [I-ST4]

I-ST7 also stated that he did a lot of reading, but sometimes he asked other good students for assistance:

There were lots of things I needed to ask them for help on, because they learn better than me and they did some studies in this field in this institution before. [I-ST7]

Participants (I-ST1, I-ST4 and I-ST7; II-ST5, II-ST7 and II-ST8) all supported the idea that getting along with Hong Kong students had many educational benefits, since Hong Kong students could teach good learning methods, identify key points of the lessons, and help prepare for exams.

### ***5.3.3 Finding an Efficient Method of Learning***

The progress made by the mainland students in the first year was reflected in the different strategies they used in their second year to help with their studying. Their strategies included finding good role models, finding their own efficient method of studying, and using the support of the university.

Participants in Group I, such as I-ST1, I-ST2, I-ST3, I-ST6 and in Group II: II-ST2, II-ST3 and II-ST8, discussed their special methods of adjusting to the new studying environment:

Preparing more for the exams definitely helps as exams are so important in Hong Kong. If I can prepare more for the exam, I can do better in my studies and my GPA can increase. With this method my GPA is better this year than the first term.  
[I-ST2]

The participants generally found that some Hong Kong students could serve as good role models for mainland students regarding study methods:

In Hong Kong I shared a room with a local student and I learned a lot. My roommate told me a lot. In the Marketing course she has very good learning methods. She found the key points in the materials the teacher gave to us and then she would prepare for the exams following these key points. Other students have good ways of dealing with exams. Figuring out a good learning method, such as memorising what the teacher said in class and preparing for the exam by following the guidelines given by the teacher, is very important to success in study. [II-ST8]

II-ST3 also used a similar method:

I mainly follow other students and used the same methods as them and do as they do. I haven't made any changes to help me adjust to the differences here. I just memorise things, memorise everything that teachers taught us in class, in a "stuffing duck" method. [II-ST3]

The "stuffing duck" (*Tian Ya*) education method, similar to "spoon-fed education" in English, is a common name used to describe a dull teaching method in the Chinese education tradition. It means that a student's learning is based on memorisation rather than understanding. Teachers just teach students the material directly from the books and students just memorise what teachers teach in class without any need to understand the material or to know how to use the material the teacher taught.

Group II Participants II-ST2, II-ST4, II-ST7 and II-ST8 agreed that finding an efficient method of learning was the best way to improve their study. These efficient methods included listening carefully to teachers during the lectures, writing down the difficult English words on paper and trying to memorise them little by little everyday, and preparing for exams by following the guidelines given by teachers. Only II-ST2, II-ST4, II-ST7 and II-ST8 gave their opinions about their method of learning. Here are two examples:

I took time to read the whole book first and this made it easier to understand the lecturer in the class as the lecturer only gave the key points in the lecture. This principle could be applied to understand other courses. [II-ST8]

During the class I try my best to take as many notes as possible. If I cannot understand what was said, I just write down the sounds from what I heard from teachers, and after class I would check the words with other students. [II-ST2]

#### **5.3.4      *Using the Support from the University***

Most participants from both groups indicated that the proper adjustment to the new environment came not only from their own effort but also from the University's support. They also agreed that the University had taken a few institutional measures to accommodate the needs of mainland students and support them, such as providing a

dormitory to all mainland students, providing English and Cantonese courses, and a Buddy Programme. Some of these measures were considered effective by mainland students, while others needed improvement. For example, II-ST1 indicated that most mainland students needed to go to Shenzhen to buy cheap air tickets to go back home in every holiday season. It would have been very helpful if the University had organised one agency to help them buy group tickets, as this would have saved them money and time. This kind of service was a common practice in big corporate companies in Hong Kong, but many might question whether such a service was a reasonable expectation of a university with thousands of students.

A few participants (such as I-ST7 and II-ST8) believed that the university did not do much to help mainland students to adjust to the new environment in Hong Kong, but they agreed that there was not much that the University could do. For II-ST8, adjustment to the new environment was a personal matter and the personality of an individual might decide whether or not the person could easily get adjusted to the new environment. If the person was optimistic and easy-going, he/she might get along with Hong Kong students easily and the adjustment process might be easier. She was a good example of this.

Participants such as II-ST1 and II-ST4 indicated that the university provided support for all students and the mainland students should use the university's facilities and special classes as much as possible.

Mainland students also need external support in addition to their own effort. The University offers support and organises many free English courses such as EIL, CILL, ELEP courses on campus. [II-ST4]

The University offers some English classes and Cantonese classes for the mainland students in the Foundation Year. It is very helpful. The English classes were for 3 months and the Cantonese classes were held every week. [II-ST1]

In summary, although the participants faced numerous challenges in adjusting to living and studying in Hong Kong, they devised various strategies to cope and these have proved beneficial in helping them to maintain a level of success in their studies. With language as the biggest barrier, they steeped themselves in the culture and made connections with Hong Kong students in order to learn from them and help them adjust. They have also

taken advantage of the programmes offered by the University to make studying and living more manageable.

## **5.4 Future Plans of Mainland Chinese Students after Graduation**

Based on the information generated through face-to-face interviews with nineteen students, the study notes three types of plans mainland students have after graduating in Hong Kong: 1) return to mainland China; 2) relocate to another country, and 3) remain in Hong Kong.

### **5.4.1 *Return to Mainland China***

Three participants (II-ST6, II-ST7, and II-ST8) indicated that they did not want to return to mainland China, at least not immediately after they finished their studies in Hong Kong. These three participants intended to return to mainland China only after having worked or stayed more than seven years in Hong Kong and got their permanent residence in Hong Kong or the Hong Kong SAR (PRC Special Administrative Region) passport. In this way they would not be controlled by the Chinese government even while working in mainland China in the future. Many participants had plans to stay in Hong Kong:

I want to find an opportunity to work in a company. Eventually, I want to return to Shenzhen; there I can have more and better opportunities. My family is there. After graduation, I don't know if I will work or continue to study, but I want to have the permanent ID of Hong Kong after staying here for 7 years. It may also be possible that I go overseas to study. [II-ST6]

II-ST7 and II-ST8 shared a similar plan. II-ST8 added:

After graduation I hope I can become a permanent resident but I feel that it is too depressing here. Then I will go back home with my experience here. I want to go home after I get the Hong Kong permanent residency as it is convenient for me to go overseas. I feel the life here is too boring. [II-ST8]

### **5.4.2     *Relocate to Another Country***

One of the reasons that mainland students opt to go to Hong Kong is that it acts as a bridge to other countries. According to four participants (II-ST2, II-ST5, III-ST1 and III-ST4), once mainland students finished their study in Hong Kong, one of the most popular options was to go to another country, mostly the US and UK, to pursue their master's or doctorate. Their parents' opinions had strong impact on their decisions. The following are the opinions of II-ST2 and II-ST5:

If I decide to continue on my field, I have to do postgraduate studies. If I can be accepted to do a master's degree, I will do it, but it depends on my parents also because they pay my study. [II-ST2]

My parents thought that coming to Hong Kong would make it easier to go overseas. The final objective is to go to an overseas university, such as MIT in the US, or National University in Singapore. [II-ST5]

III-ST1 was sent to the US by the University for an exchange programme of one semester, which was about 6 months, and she was very pleased with that experience. She had met a few good friends there and also she took that opportunity to improve her spoken English. Through that experience in the US, she recognised the differences between China and a Western country and she gained more confidence in using English in daily life. Therefore going to the US became her ideal option if she could be admitted by an American university to do postgraduate studies after graduation:

I spent one semester in the US as an exchange student last year, and I enjoyed that experience very much. I got to know many friends over there and I am looking forward to going there again if I can. My previous boyfriend from Shanghai is still studying in the US. I do not know whether he is still waiting for me, but I still want to go there for further study. Even though I might be able to go to the US, the chance of being in the same state with him is slim as the US is a big country, so I do not count on this relationship. [III-ST1]

According to III-ST1, the plan for the future was related to the reasons why she had chosen to come to Hong Kong. She attended an international school in Nanjing and



from a young age she has been dreaming of going to the US. From her point of view, going to Hong Kong was a bridge to realise her dream of going to the US.

### ***5.4.3 Remaining in Hong Kong***

Other than relocating to another country and returning to mainland China, remaining in Hong Kong after graduation, to work or further their study, was the third option for mainland students after their graduation. Among all three options, the idea of remaining in Hong Kong was the most chosen by participants in all three groups. Among the nineteen participants, thirteen indicated that they would prefer to remain in Hong Kong for work or for further study. They were: seven participants in Group I (I-ST1, I-ST2, I-ST3, I-ST4, I-ST5, I-ST6, I-ST7); three in Group II (II-ST1, II-ST3, II-ST6); and two in Group III (III-ST2, III-ST3).

#### ***5.4.3.1 Advantages to remaining in Hong Kong***

Remaining in Hong Kong after graduation would provide numerous advantages for mainland students, according to I-ST2, I-ST3, I-ST4; II-ST6, II-ST7, II-ST8. Participants such as II-ST6, II-ST7, II-ST8 indicated that they preferred to stay in Hong Kong to work a few more years after their graduation. This could allow them to obtain Hong Kong permanent residence after having stayed in Hong Kong for seven years and also gain some working experience in Hong Kong. Whether they would go back to the mainland after seven years would depend, they said, on the situation of mainland China at the time:

After my graduation in three years, I hope I can work three more years in Hong Kong and do a part-time master's degree. This makes 7 years of stay in Hong Kong and I can get the Permanent Identity of Hong Kong. Then I will go to the US to do an MBA. My final objective is to go back to Shanghai. Seven and eight years later it would probably be better to return to China than staying in Hong Kong. I will have a degree from the US and lots of experiences and then I will go back to Shanghai. [II-ST6]

I have the following plans after my graduation: 1) If I can continue my study I will; 2) Find a job in Hong Kong to have experiences and a permanent ID and then go back to China. [II-ST7]

If mainland students decided to stay in Hong Kong after their graduation, their motives were either to work or to further their studies. Five participants (I-ST2, I-ST3, I-ST4, I-ST6, and II-ST3) indicated that they would like to stay in Hong Kong to look for a job or to do their postgraduate studies:

I often think about the future after my graduation. I don't want to do any studies. I only want to find a decent job. My study is not so satisfactory, so I don't want to do postgraduate studies any more. I hope that having a Bachelor's degree can provide me an opportunity to find a job in Hong Kong. [I-ST2]

First of all I want to work in Hong Kong for a few years after my graduation and then do postgraduate study. I also want to stay in Hong Kong for seven years until I get the Permanent Identity which requires 7 years of stay in Hong Kong. My parents want me to go to the US because they have business there. [I-ST3]

There are a lot of university graduates in China. The market is bad and a lot of people are jobless. I'd like to stay in Hong Kong for study or for work. [I-ST4]

Though obtaining permanent residence status was the major reason for remaining in Hong Kong, the participants discussed other advantages of remaining, at least for a number of years. Participants I-ST2, I-ST3, I-ST4, I-ST5, I-ST6, I-ST7, II-ST3, and II-ST4, spoke of other advantages, besides gaining the Hong Kong ID card after seven years, of remaining in Hong Kong. For example, I-ST2 and I-ST3 believed that Hong Kong was better than the mainland for living, because one did not need an advanced degree in order to find a job. In China university graduates currently have great trouble finding a job. Most Hong Kong students did not want to do postgraduate studies and they only wanted to work, thus setting a culture into which mainland students could fit; therefore there were better opportunities for mainland students in Hong Kong as the unemployment rate in Hong Kong was lower and the competition among university graduates was less fierce than in mainland China, according to I-ST2 and I-ST3. The advantages of working in Hong Kong included the ease of finding a good job with a high salary. Participants also

believed that Hong Kong was an international city where they could meet different people and see different things. Several participants in Group I shared their reasons for staying. Student I-ST2 claimed:

Hong Kong is better as here they don't need a very high diploma in order to find a job. In China a university graduate has big difficulty to find a job now. Most Hong Kong students don't want to do postgraduate study, they only want to work, so we have better opportunities. The advantages of working in Hong Kong are: it is easy to find a good job; the salary is high; the management is good so it provides a good opportunity to gain good experiences. [I-ST2]

The advantages of staying in Hong Kong are: I can have good working experiences because Hong Kong can provide me a very special working environment. Hong Kong is an international city and I can meet different people and see different things. If I can, I would like to go overseas and start the postgraduate study, other countries have advanced technologies to learn. [I-ST3]

The reasons for staying in Hong Kong given by participants in Group II are similar to those for Group I. The following statements indicate the reasons listed by participants in Group II:

I can stay in Hong Kong and find a job. After four years of study, if I can work here for 3 more years, I can get the Hong Kong Permanent Identity. I want to have two children. Due to the single child policy of the mainland, I can't have two children legally back home. [II-ST4]

The advantages of staying here are: the system of Hong Kong society is well developed. Each company has its own way of managing. There are many big companies and there are a lot of opportunities. There is fierce competition in China also. The graduates from Beijing University or Tsinghua University are more competent than us. [II-ST3]

For I-ST1, II-ST2, II-ST4 and III-ST4, one advantage of remaining in Hong Kong was that there was no language barrier. These four students came from Guangdong Province and their native language was Cantonese, therefore there was no language barrier and the

lifestyles were the same in Guangdong as in Hong Kong. Hong Kong as a Special Administrative Region of China has its own particular advantages that living in Guangdong could not offer, as indicated in the above sections of this study.

From the employment point of view, many Hong Kong companies need graduates with a mainland background and Hong Kong higher education as they believe that mainland graduates from Hong Kong institutions could go to China to work for them. This would, as well, offer great opportunities for mainland students to find a job in Hong Kong and still work back home. It is a double benefit for the mainland students, since they could go back home to be with their family members, but they also could enjoy the high salary of the Hong Kong company. III-ST3 indicated:

I understand that many Hong Kong companies opened their branches in Shanghai and they need competent people who are mainland Chinese, are fluent in English, Cantonese and Putonghua, and who received their higher education in Hong Kong. These people are used to the mainland environment and they are also familiar with Hong Kong system. If I want to work in a big international company in Shanghai after my graduation, I would have a better chance to be hired. [III-ST3]

#### **5.4.3.2      *Strategies to prepare for their future***

Some participants in Group I (I-ST2, I-ST4, and I-ST7) indicated that if they stayed in Hong Kong after their graduation, they would like to integrate more with Hong Kong society. Participants I-ST2, I-ST3, I-ST4, I-ST6, I-ST7, II-ST3, and II-ST4 also realised that if they stayed in Hong Kong, having more connections was as important as, and even the means of, integrating better in Hong Kong society.

I want to fit in more. If I want to work in Hong Kong, I need more human relationships. If I want to go into business on my own, I also need to have connections in China. I would like to communicate more with Hong Kong students and have more contacts with them, which is not difficult. Mainland students should have more connections with the Hong Kong society. They should have a good diploma and they should know how to create a good career in Hong Kong. [I-ST2]

Whether they stayed for further study or for work, most participants, other than I-ST3 and II-ST5, indicated the need to immerse themselves more in the culture and spend more time with Hong Kong people, taking every opportunity to improve their language skills.

In summary, although it was unanimous that staying in Hong Kong to obtain the permanent residence status was the best option, the participants indicated other advantages to staying, including expanding professional horizons. Although the majority of participants felt that Hong Kong and, in a few cases, other countries offered better opportunities for study and work, it was not their intention to abandon their home in mainland China or their family permanently.

## **5.5 Summary**

Chapters 4 and 5 described the participants in relation to their familial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds in order to provide a context for interpreting the interview results. The interview data were analysed according to the following themes: the difficulties the participants faced living and studying in Hong Kong, strategies adopted to face and overcome these difficulties, and finally the future plans of the participants. The experiences of living and studying and the challenges were related to differences in culture, language, university systems and self-discipline. The strategies of the first year students focused on learning the language, adjusting to being away from their families, and becoming more independent. The second year students were more self-confident and their focus shifted into being more steeped in the Hong Kong culture and building relationships with the Hong Kong students, from whom they were able to learn more coping strategies. It was clear that living and studying in Hong Kong was less stressful in the second year. The majority of the students were planning to stay in Hong Kong for further studies and to possibly find a job as a means to obtain their permanent residence status in Hong Kong, as they felt that there were more opportunities open to them in that way.

## **CHAPTER 6**

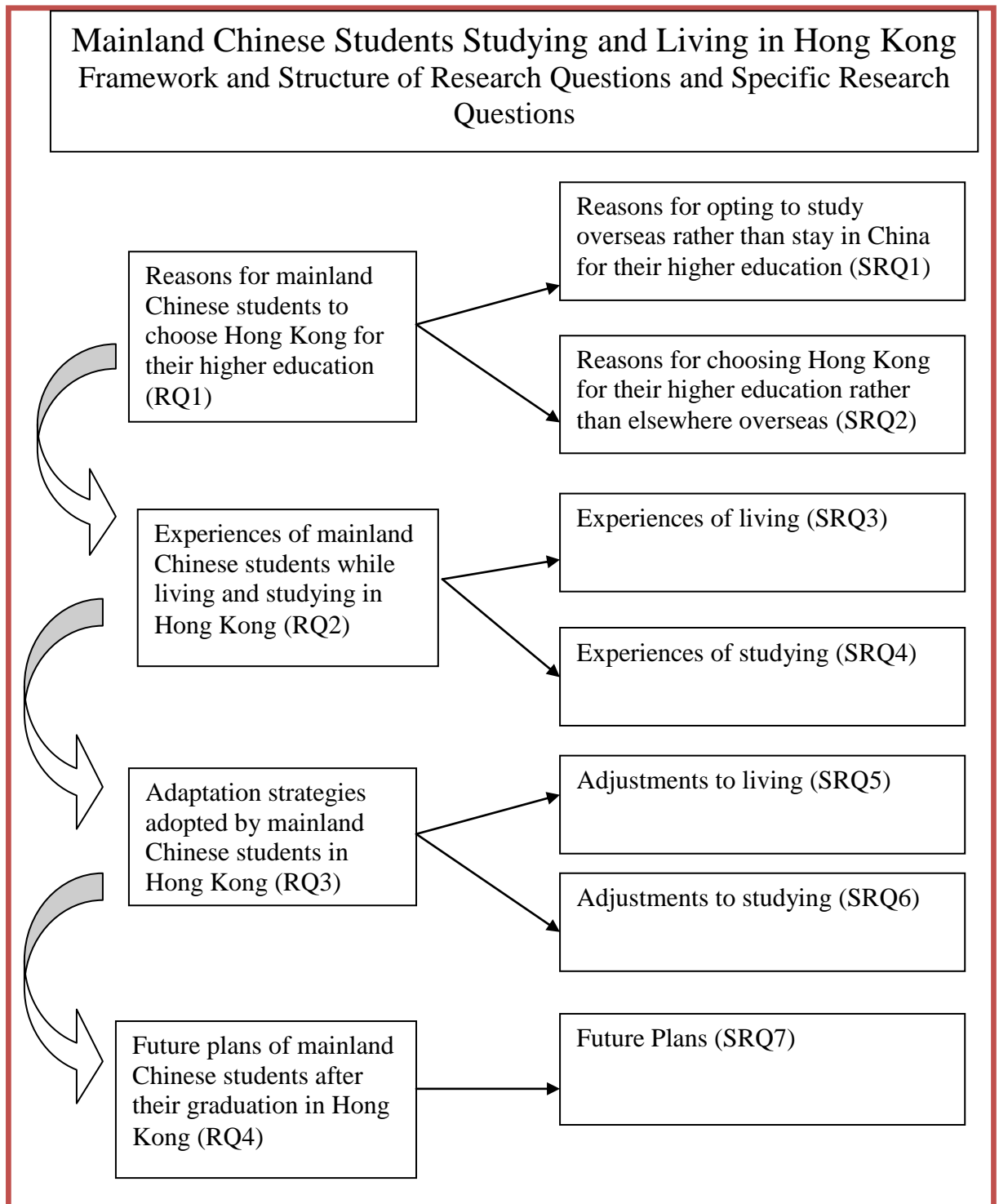
### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The study uses a qualitative approach to better understand how mainland students make sense of their experiences of living and studying in Hong Kong, and allows mainland students a “voice” in the research. The research applies an interpretivist paradigm: it does not offer testable hypotheses, try to establish statistically reliable relationships or generate a theory to explain the findings. Rather, it looks for “thick descriptions” as presented by students themselves and constructs themes and patterns from those descriptions to make sense of the data. Since this project comprises a large amount of detailed description, the in-depth, detailed case study method is most appropriate to explore the research questions.

The main data collection method used was the semi-structured interview. Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with nineteen mainland Chinese students in a Hong Kong institution called “The University”. BERA’s revised ethical guidelines for educational research (BERA 2004) were followed, as stated in Chapter 3. To ensure validity and credibility, Guba’s operational techniques for qualitative research were followed to test for “credibility”, “transferability”, “dependability” and “confirmability” (Guba 1981, pp. 75–92). The research process was rigorous and transparent at all stages. Rigour was also achieved by carefully selecting samples, piloting the interview schedule and adopting a systematic approach to analysing the data. Sampling methods defined by Gall, Gall & Borg (2003) were adopted, including purposeful sampling, opportunistic sampling and a combination of maximum variation and snowball sampling, to meet the needs of this study. The use of different sampling methods allowed access to a range of variation within the particular university by asking well-situated people to recommend cases to study.

This chapter addresses the main Research Questions (RQ) and Specific Research Questions (SRQ). The rest of the chapter is organised as shown in the following Figure 8:



**Figure 8. Structure of Research Questions and Specific Research Questions**

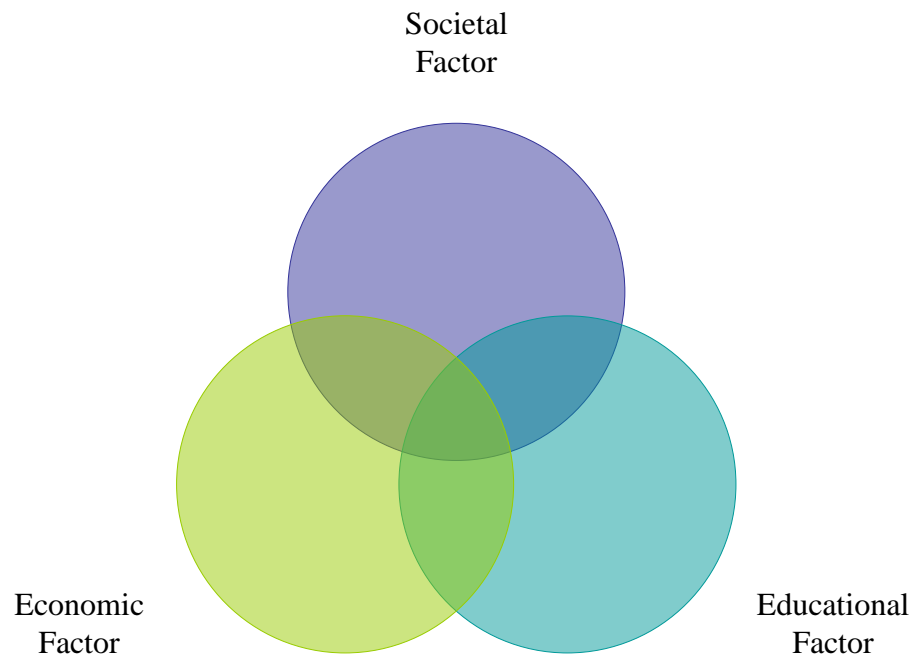
Section 6.2 focuses on the reasons why mainland Chinese students study overseas (SRQ1) and why they choose Hong Kong in particular (SRQ2). Section 6.3 articulates the difficulties these students encounter while living (SRQ3) and studying (SRQ4) in Hong Kong. Section 6.4 discusses their adjustments to living (SRQ5) and to studying (SRQ6)

and proposes a new model of adaptation strategies used by mainland students. Section 6.5 examines the future plans of mainland students after graduation (SRQ7).

## **6.2 Reasons why Mainland Chinese Students Choose Hong Kong to Further their Study**

### **6.2.1 *Reasons for Studying Overseas rather than in China (SRQ1)***

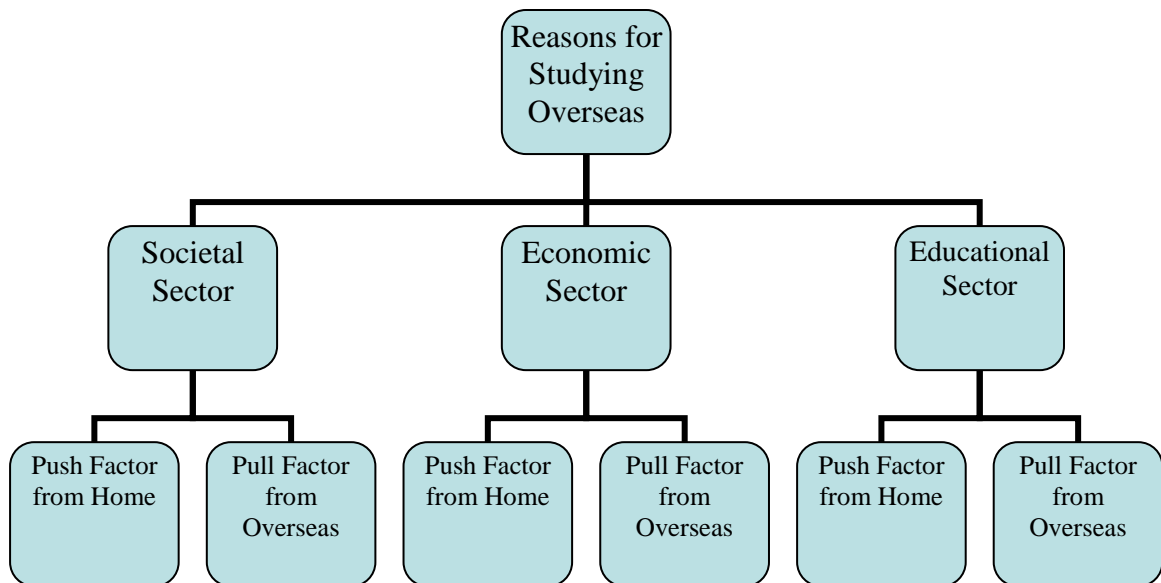
Importantly, there were no differences among the three groups of participants regarding their reasons for studying overseas. The reasons fell into three categories: societal, economic and educational, as shown in Figure 9:



**Figure 9. Reasons for Mainland Chinese Students to Study Overseas rather than in China**

Each of the above three categories includes push and pull factors. Push factors reflect the current situation in mainland China that influences students to leave, and pull factors reflect the advantages overseas that attract mainland students. Push and pull factors in the above three categories: societal, economic and educational, are illustrated in Figure 10:





**Figure 10. Push and Pull Factors in Three Categories: Societal, Economic and Educational**

Societal push factors listed by four participants included not being admitted by the top class of Chinese universities, such as Beijing University and Tsinghua University. One indicated that being unable to have a big family under China's one-child policy was the main reason for going overseas. By contrast, two students, both majoring in Business, had turned down offers from Beijing University and Zhongshan University, believing their futures would be brighter after graduating from the Faculty of Business in Hong Kong. Pull factors for one participant included an opportunity to experience a Western culture and lifestyle and enjoy the feeling of "East meets West", while for another it enabled a long-standing dream of seeing the Western world.

Economic reasons emerged as the main drivers for overseas study (indicated by sixteen participants out of nineteen: six in Group I, seven in Group II, three in Group III). Push factors for three students were the high unemployment rate for regular university graduates in China, and concerns that they could not compete with graduates from overseas. Pull factors for two participants were the confidence of a higher paid job after graduation from universities in developed countries rather than China, and a better chance of being hired by international companies in China.

Educational push factors included a dislike of Chinese teaching methods (two students), dissatisfaction with the Chinese education system (four) and a belief that Chinese education was not internationally recognised (two). Educational pull factors included the opportunity to study a subject not available or not up to international standards in China, such as zoology of large mammals (one student) and global supply chain management (three).

Although Zheng (2003) identified three further categories of factors shaping students' intentions to study overseas, namely personal, cultural and political, these factors can be combined into *societal*, *economic* and *educational factors*. Personal factors fall into all three of these categories, as individuals and society are co-dependent and coexisting, while both cultural and political factors form part of the societal category.

### **6.2.2    *Reasons for Choosing Hong Kong rather than Elsewhere Overseas (SRQ2)***

These reasons can also be categorised into the same three groups: *societal*, *economic* and *educational*. From the *societal* aspect, the study discovered that Hong Kong offered many advantages not available in mainland China or elsewhere, such as a bilingual Chinese and English environment, a mixture of Eastern and Western cultures (two students), a bridge to overseas (six), greater proximity to mainland China (two), and ease of establishing international relationships (one). For native Cantonese speakers whose families lived in Shenzhen or Guangdong province (four students), it was convenient for returning home on weekends or holidays, and the lifestyle and dialect were similar. Two students said that Hong Kong people were very friendly and the environment cleaner and safer than the mainland and elsewhere.

*Economic* factors were also important in choosing Hong Kong, and related directly to funding for education and opportunities for future employment. Three students said that tuition in Hong Kong was more affordable than in the US or other Western countries. In addition, like other Western universities, Hong Kong institutions offered full and partial scholarships.

More importantly, the choice of Hong Kong was related to the future plans of mainland students, as discussed in Chapter 5. Three participants chose Hong Kong intending to stay

and work there after graduation. Four participants also stated that Hong Kong had more job opportunities than the mainland and other countries, and that they could earn more than if they graduated in mainland China.

The study found that parents and families often played a crucial role in the choice of Hong Kong. Six participants indicated that their parents paid for their study overseas and chose where they went and what they did. One participant from Liaoning province indicated that going to Hong Kong reunited her with her family, as her father had been sent by his company to work in Hong Kong.

Among *educational* reasons, six students believed that Hong Kong universities had a good reputation in China, and provided better education than the mainland in many subjects, such as Business, Accounting and Finance, Logistics and Biology. Three participants felt that teaching methods in Hong Kong were more advanced and university education generally better than in mainland China.

Two students thought that Hong Kong would allow them to experience new things and meet new teachers. They stated that 90% of Hong Kong lecturers had received doctorates overseas and some had international reputations in their research areas, unlike in China or many other universities in the world.

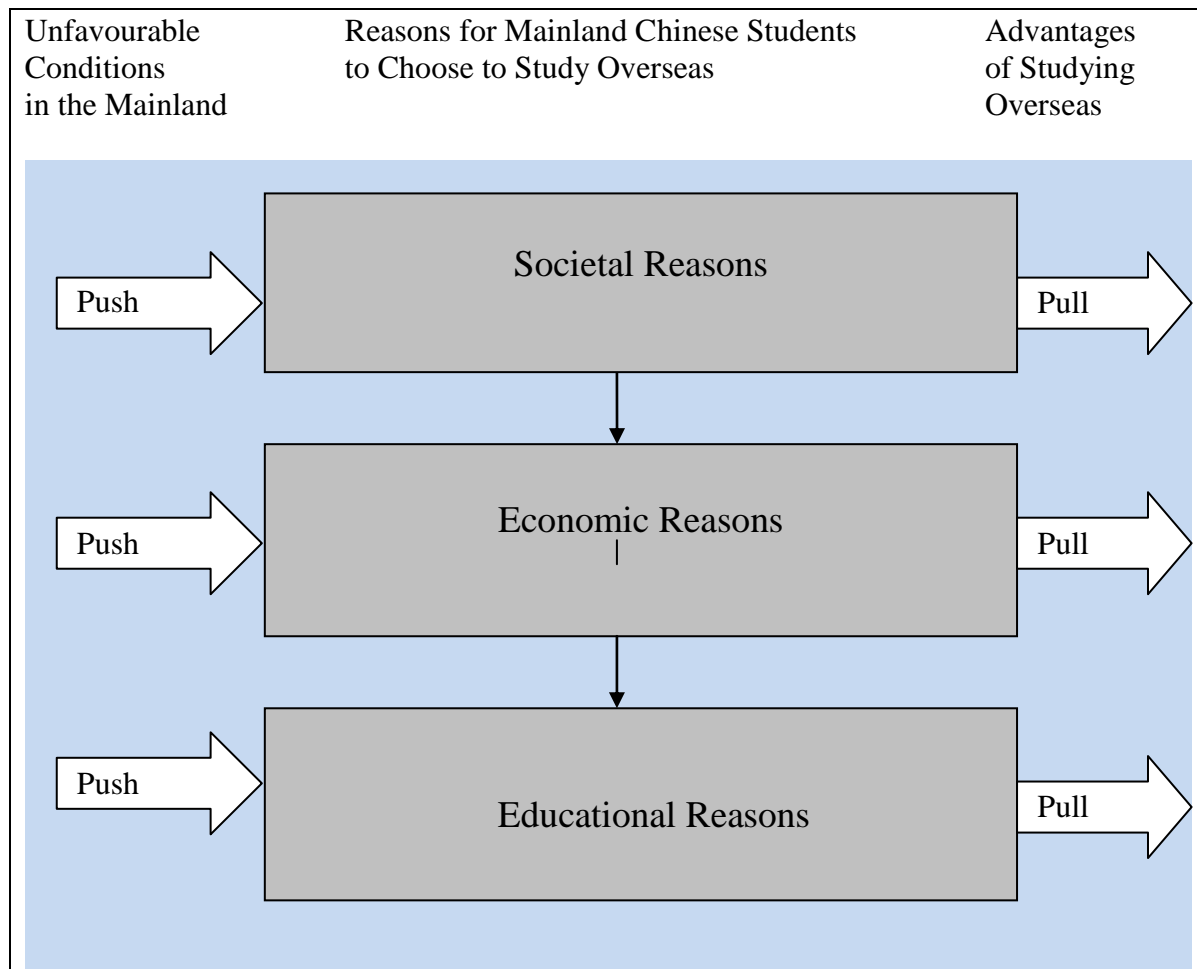
Another reason for choosing Hong Kong, according to four participants, was that most Hong Kong universities teach in English (except for Chinese or China-related courses), and so train students not only in their subjects, but also in English.

As highlighted above, students' reasons for choosing Hong Kong involved not only the social and economic conditions in China and Hong Kong, but also personal and family needs and backgrounds. This study suggests that Hong Kong offers mainland students many opportunities. It is considered to be affordable and to form a bridge between East and West, to have more respected teaching and learning resources than the mainland, and to improve students' English and overall skills. Its unique societal, economic and geographical situation explains why Hong Kong is perceived as one of the best choices for mainland students to further their studies.

### **6.2.3     *Comparison with Previous Research***

Previous research by Altbach (1998), Mazzarol & Soutar (2001), Pang & Appleton (2004), Shen (2005), Ong (2006), Li & Bray (2007) established a foundation for analysing why mainland Chinese students opt to study overseas, that is, what the present study terms push factors. However, these researchers mostly analysed the situation of mainland Chinese students in the US, Canada, Australia, Europe and Singapore. Mazzarol & Soutar (2001) focused mainly on the external mobility factors of students from Taiwan, mainland China, India and Indonesia. They saw the main reasons for overseas study as the prestige of foreign degrees, advancement in English and foreign languages, the greater likelihood of securing well-paid jobs in the future (Pang & Appleton 2004; Altbach 1998; Ong 2006), better courses, the ability to gain entry to particular programmes, an improved understanding of foreign societies, and an intention to emigrate after graduation (Mazzarol & Soutar 2001; Shen 2005). Pang & Appleton (2004) found that the main reason for mainland students going overseas was a desire to immigrate.

This study agrees with the model created by Altbach (1998) regarding push and pull factors to examine the reasons why mainland Chinese students choose Hong Kong to further their study. For Altbach (1998), push factors are the unfavourable conditions in mainland China, and pull factors are generous scholarships, excellent research facilities and other opportunities in the host countries. On the push-pull factor model, this study confirms and elaborates Altbach's research by indicating that the push and pull factors are not only limited to unfavourable and favourable conditions, but they exist in three categories: societal, economic and educational. Each category includes push and pull factors that influence mainland students to leave mainland China for their higher education. Push factors refer to the current situation in mainland China that influences students to seek their education overseas; and pull factors refer to the advantages overseas, such as the US, the UK, Europe and Hong Kong, which attract many mainland students each year. The model suggested in this study is illustrated in the following Figure 11:



**Figure 11. Push and Pull Factor Model for Mainland Chinese Students Choosing to Study Overseas**

Studies of mainland students in Hong Kong are scarce. Most research listed the reasons why mainland students chose the US (Zweig & Rozen 2003; Pang & Appleton 2004; Mazzarol & Soutar 2001), or the UK (Shen 2005) or Singapore (Ong 2006). For mainland students in Australia, Mazzarol & Soutar (2001) listed the most important factors as institutional reputation for quality, willingness to recognise previous qualifications, and recognition of the degrees by employers. By contrast, the present study found that willingness to recognise previous qualifications and recognition of degrees by employers were not relevant to mainland students in choosing Hong Kong. First, Hong Kong is part of China, despite a different administrative system, and recognises qualifications gained in mainland China, which other countries might not. Recognition of degrees by employers is also not relevant, as Hong Kong employers recognise all degrees gained in China, which other countries might not.

Similar to Zweig & Rosen's (2003) and Pang & Appleton's (2004) suggestion that most students went to study in the US in order to immigrate long term, this study found that twelve of the nineteen mainland students wanted to work in Hong Kong after graduation. There is a subtle difference, however, between Pang & Appleton's study and the current study in terms of the status of mainland students in Hong Kong and other students in the US. Mainland students who would stay in Hong Kong after graduation cannot be considered to be technically emigrating to another country. Hong Kong is part of China and Hong Kong passport holders, in fact, are holding People's Republic of China Hong Kong Passports and therefore are Chinese citizens. Admittedly the "One Country, Two Systems" policy has brought to Hong Kong people many advantages that mainlanders do not have back home, at least for 50 years starting from 1997. For this reason, mainland students who choose to stay in Hong Kong will in effect stay in their own country.

Based on the interview data, an important reason given by three participants for studying overseas was to return to China to work in a well-known international company in Shanghai or Hong Kong, rather than emigrate. In other words, studying overseas might give them the chance of being employed by international companies with branches in China. This would enable them to return to China as relatively highly paid employees of an international company. This, along with other reasons, demonstrates the important connection in students' minds between studying overseas (SRQ1) and their future work-life plans (SRQ4).

Ong's study (2006) indicated that among the difficulties encountered by mainland Chinese students in Singapore were cultural problems, societal and living environment problems, and curriculum difficulties related to learning and teaching styles. This study agrees with Ong that the biggest difficulty faced by mainland Chinese students is the language problem. A key difference between this and previous findings is that in Hong Kong, mainland students not only face one language anxiety (English) but dual language difficulties (English and Cantonese) as discussed in Chapter 4. The present study examined the mainland Chinese students' experiences in Hong Kong from two aspects: living experiences and educational experiences. From the living aspect, this study analysed difficulties encountered by mainland students in Hong Kong at two levels: societal level and institutional level. From the societal level, mainland students not only face similar difficulties mentioned by Ong of mainland students in Singapore, such as

cultural, and societal and living environment problems and curriculum difficulties, but also encounter other problems such as, financial stress and discrimination. From the institutional level, mainland students in Hong Kong encounter difficulties such as, different mentality and interests, different personalities, different time management from Hong Kong students, difficulties adjusting to the new living environment and independence/self-discipline. On the educational aspects, in addition to different learning and teaching styles as mentioned by Ong (2006) in Singapore, mainland students in Hong Kong need to overcome difficulties such as stress from study and the lack of cooperation skills.

This study suggests that the low tuition fees in some European welfare countries, such as Scandinavia, Germany and France, which remained cost efficient and attractive to many Chinese students until recently (Shen 2005, p. 430), may now be less important than before. Most participants in this study came from one-child families. Therefore the low tuition fees in some countries seem less attractive than before. The main reason is that the family incomes have been increased in China recently and paying for one child to study overseas does not seem too difficult to afford for most families with medium incomes. In this circumstance, tuition waivers and lower tuition fees are considered less important compared with other factors such as opportunities for employment in the future, studying and living environment.

Contrary to Li and Bray's study (2007), which found that most mainland students were sponsored by scholarships, the present study found that a very high proportion of the nineteen participants were self-financed. This phenomenon appears to reflect the recent economic growth and income increases in China. Sixteen of the nineteen participants were self-financed and only three were sponsored by scholarships. Therefore scholarships, although attractive, may not be the main reason for mainland students opting to study overseas. Li and Bray (2007) stated that the standard push-pull model, in which both push and pull factors were external forces, had limitations. Personal characteristics also played a crucial role, including socio-economic status, academic ability, gender, age, motivation, and aspirations. This study agrees that the push and pull factors include both internal and external forces, and found external forces and personal characteristics to be equally important. If a student's family background was poor, self-financed study in Hong Kong would not be possible. If the Chinese government did not offer Hong Kong

institutions the special privilege of recruiting students simultaneously with first category universities after the annual National University Examinations, application to Hong Kong universities would be less convenient.

This study confirms that socio-economic status and academic ability were important in the students' choice of Hong Kong, but could not confirm whether gender, age, motivation and aspiration were also important. All participants were of a similar age, and the sampling method did not select equal numbers of female and male students, so this study cannot indicate whether age and gender played a role or whether there are relationships between gender, age, motivation and aspiration. In addition, sampling was limited to certain departments and faculties where most mainland students were studying, such as Marketing, Accounting and Finance, and Logistics in the Faculty of Business, Math and Biology in the Faculty of Applied Sciences, and Electronic & Information Engineering in the Faculty of Engineering. Many other departments did not recruit any mainland students.

### **6.3 Experiences of Mainland Chinese Students in Hong Kong**

This study discovered that the difficulties encountered by mainland Chinese students living and studying in Hong Kong could be categorised into three levels: *societal*, *institutional* and *educational*. Living difficulties occurred mainly at the societal and institutional level, while study difficulties existed particularly at the educational level (that is, the classroom). Section 6.3.1 discusses living difficulties and section 6.3.2 focuses on educational difficulties.

#### **6.3.1 Experiences of Living (SRQ3)**

At the *societal* level, participants indicated four main difficulties: cultural differences between mainland and Hong Kong students (ten participants), the double language hurdles of English and Cantonese (eight), financial stress (two), and discrimination (four). Cultural differences include the fact that Hong Kong is a fast-paced city while mainland China is slower, and that Hong Kong is a multi-lingual environment, with many other dialects and foreign languages, while only Putonghua is used in mainland China. Most participants believed that these cultural differences contributed to the difficulty of



integrating into Hong Kong culture. Four participants were dissatisfied with their lack of integration, blaming lack of time and the language barrier, but intended to make more effort if they decided to stay after graduation. Three native Cantonese speakers from Guangdong Province found that even though Cantonese did not cause problems, cultural differences, financial difficulties and discrimination by Hong Kong people still caused a barrier to integration, as discussed in Section 4.5 of Chapter 4.

At the *institutional* level, participants identified five main difficulties: the different mentality and interests of mainland and Hong Kong students (five participants), the different personalities of Hong Kong students which made it difficult to become friends (seven), a difference in time management (three), difficulties in adjusting to the new living environment (six), and independence and self-discipline (three). These participants indicated that they spent most of their spare time on weekends and holidays among mainland students. The difference in mentality, interests, personalities and time management were all barriers to getting along with Hong Kong students, who were nevertheless mostly nice and friendly, as discussed in section 4.5.2. These factors also caused difficulties in adjusting to the new living environment. Hong Kong's hot, humid climate, mild tasting food and different living habits were sources of difficulty for students from northeast China, according to three students from Beijing, one from Jiangxi and another from Jiangsu. One student from Shenzhen found loneliness the main difficulty, but he could go home fortnightly, as Hong Kong is very close. His loneliness was echoed by two others who were away from home for the first time and lived alone in Hong Kong, only seeing their parents twice per year. Other participants did not mention loneliness and homesickness. Independence and self-discipline became an issue for participants who were single children and had been closely supervised, and now had to manage their own time, money, bills, after-class activities, credit cards and personal care.

Researchers (Li, Z. 2000; Liang 2003; Zhang 2001) examined Chinese students in other countries such as the UK, the US and Singapore, as discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.1. Li, Z. (2000) examined the stress experienced by mainland Chinese students in the UK. Li's findings suggested that stress levels did not vary significantly between the beginning and the end of the term and the most important sources of stress were academic: essay writing, literacy and participating in discussion. The current study did not measure whether the level of stress varied depending on the length of mainland students' stay in

Hong Kong. It did show, however, that sources of stress were different, depending on students' original city, the department in which they studied, whether they were sponsored by scholarship or self-financed, and family financial situation. One example illustrates that for students who came from Guangdong province (I-ST1, II-ST2, III-ST4), the Cantonese language and the local living environment are similar to Hong Kong, hence there are fewer problems compared to students who originate from northern China. A further example concerns different stressors experienced by those who are sponsored by scholarship and those who are self-financed. For those sponsored by scholarship, there is a need to keep the GPA at a very high standard (3.5) in order to keep the scholarship for the following year; for those self-financed students, there is a need to watch their expenses carefully as Hong Kong is a very expensive city and money sent by their parents from China is not easily gained in mainland China.

Liang (2003) analysed the situation of Chinese students in the US and reported that the most frequently encountered problems were financial difficulties and depression. This study found that even though financial difficulty and personal depression were among the difficulties that mainland students faced in Hong Kong, all participants indicated that the biggest difficulty for them was language. Compared with language difficulties, all other difficulties are of secondary importance.

This study agrees with Zhang's (2001) study on mainland Chinese students in Singapore, which claimed that mainland students felt lost because their teachers did not provide them with clear direction. The participants, especially in Group I, indicated that the teaching and learning styles in Hong Kong were different from the styles in the mainland, and the role of teachers towards students was different. In the mainland, teachers are more like student's parents and control most decisions regarding what subjects to take and when to go to classes, as the teaching schedule is fixed by the university or the departments. In Hong Kong students need to do everything on their own, and they also need to manage their time and choose suitable subjects for themselves.

### **6.3.2    *Experiences of Studying (SRQ4)***

At the *educational* level, participants indicated five main difficulties: study stress (six participants), the different learning style (three), difficulty with English (seven), cooperative skills (four), and the different teaching style (seven). Hong Kong has a different educational system with different learning and teaching style compared with China, and the medium of instruction is English instead of Chinese. All fifteen participants in Groups I and II mentioned the different teaching style in Hong Kong.

Three participants said they had not expected studying to be so difficult. They felt mainland students were disadvantaged and more stressed than Hong Kong students. For example, one felt Hong Kong students were better prepared for courses in Business as they had received some training in secondary school, whereas mainland students had not. Another said that if students received poor grades, mainland students would be de-registered and sent home, while Hong Kong students could stay in Hong Kong and find a job. English was also an issue for mainland students who had received all their education in Chinese, while Hong Kong students had used English textbooks since primary school. Cooperative skills were another weak area according to four participants, as mainland students had previously done less team work in class, while Hong Kong institutions emphasised team work and group projects.

Regarding teaching styles, in Hong Kong students are expected to review and reflect upon class work by reading several books, while in mainland China subjects often have only one textbook. Three students also felt that lecturers in Hong Kong were different: they were hardworking and friendly, approachable, modest and helpful, while mainland lecturers were less approachable. One indicated that some lecturers in Hong Kong demonstrated high quality teaching skills and technical knowledge, and were internationally famous in their fields. Another believed that the relationship between student and lecturer was important in Hong Kong and that those favoured by teachers could get good internships, such as in the US and Europe, while those less favoured had to stay in Hong Kong or go to China. It could not be discerned whether this opinion was widely held, and further study is warranted.

### **6.3.3     *Comparison with Previous Research***

Much research has examined the difficulties of mainland Chinese students studying overseas (Arthur 1997; Cheng 2000; Furnham & Bochner 1986; Sun & Chen 1997; Chen 1996), but rarely when studying in Hong Kong. Cheng (2000) conceptualised these difficulties into three levels: societal, institutional, and classroom. Furnham and Bochner (1986) named three areas of difficulty: negative life events and illness, social support networks, and value differences. Sun and Chen (1997) identified three dimensions of difficulty, namely lack of language proficiency, deficiency in cultural awareness, and academic concerns due to differences in teaching and learning styles between China and America.

Based on the literature, this study summarised six common difficulties confronting mainland Chinese students studying overseas: (1) language hurdles, (2) lost identity, (3) financial stress, (4) perplexing approaches to learning and teaching, (5) “indifferent” teachers and (6) social and cultural differences.

Hong Kong is a unique overseas destination; since 1997, it has been part of China and has mostly (about 98%) ethnic Chinese inhabitants, but has special administrative and education systems. Therefore, the difficulties encountered by mainland students in Hong Kong differ from those they might encounter in other places. This study agrees with Cheng (2000) that these difficulties occur at three main levels: societal, institutional and educational as described in Chapter 4. Participants in this study did not indicate the negative life events and illnesses of Furnham and Bochner (1986), and most, except one, were happy with their experiences in Hong Kong. They agreed that institutions provided great support to help them settle in Hong Kong even though more could be done, such as establishing networks to encourage communication between Hong Kong and mainland students. This study did not find that establishing a social support network, as proposed by Furnham and Bochner (1986), was necessary.

Regarding the three dimensions of difficulty suggested by Sun & Chen (1997), this study agrees with the first dimension, namely lack of language proficiency, although it differs for mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong who face a double language hurdle (Cantonese and English) instead of only English, as encountered by mainland students in the US. This study also differs with Sun & Chen's other two dimensions: deficiency in

cultural awareness, and academic concerns due to differences in teaching and learning styles between China and America. Hong Kong and mainland China share a similar cultural background, despite the differences, as discussed in Chapter 4. The culture gap between the mainland and Hong Kong exists within the broader Chinese culture, instead of being a more marked, polarised difference, as between Chinese and American cultures. Similarly, the differences in teaching and learning styles between the mainland and Hong Kong differ to a lesser degree, when compared with those between China and America mentioned by Sun and Chen (1997), as Hong Kong has a mixture of Western and more traditional Chinese methods (such as memorising).

The present study concurs with the literature (Arthur 1997; Cheng 2000; Furnham & Bochner 1986; Sun & Chen 1997; Chen 1996) about the six dimensions of difficulty mainland students encounter overseas: language hurdles, lost identity, financial stress, perplexing approaches to learning and teaching, “indifferent” teachers and different social and cultural environments. In Hong Kong, however, language hurdles affect both living and studying, while lost identity, financial stress and different social and cultural environments occur mainly at societal and institutional levels, and perplexing approaches to learning and teaching occur at the educational (classroom) level. This study found nothing related to “indifferent” teachers, as all but one participant were delighted with their lecturers in Hong Kong.

Contrary to Li and Bray’s (2007) research, as discussed in section 2.3 1, indicating that only 10% of respondents viewed their English as inadequate for studying overseas, this study’s result is 53% of participants (eight out of fifteen participants in Group I and Group II) indicated that English was still their biggest problem in their study.

This study presents mainland students’ perceptions of two different aspects of their experiences in Hong Kong: living and studying. Although these aspects are related, they present different domains of experience and difficulty, and require different adaptation strategies, as discussed in section 6.4. For example, the language difficulty affecting living (mainly Cantonese) differs from the language difficulty affecting studying (English). In their living, mainland students need to deal with difficulties on two levels: societal and institutional, which include cultural differences, double language hurdles, financial difficulties, discrimination, differences from Hong Kong students, loneliness, independence and self-discipline. In their studies, mainland students need to conquer

study stress, different learning and teaching styles, and cooperative skills. None of the previous research (Arthur 1997; Cheng 2000; Furnham & Bochner 1986; Sun & Chen 1997; Chen 1996) has included these phenomena.

## **6.4 Adaptation Strategies of Mainland Chinese Students in Hong Kong**

### **6.4.1 *Adjustments to Living (SRQ5)***

This study found that while mainland students need to conquer numerous difficulties in Hong Kong, they develop their own strategies. Their strategies for living include conquering the communication barrier by learning Cantonese, integrating with Hong Kong students, improving self-management skills, participating in different activities, and promoting Putonghua and Chinese culture on campus.

The study also discovered that the focus of first and second year students was different, both in living and studying. During their first year, participants in Group I found it important to focus on learning the language and adjusting to independence. By the second year, Group II participants indicated that they had learned more of the Cantonese language and culture, were more confident developing closer relationships with Hong Kong students, and participated in more organisations and activities at University. These activities included a Putonghua Club to promote the official Chinese language, Chinese culture, Putonghua movies, participation in Putonghua Week, Big Mouth to practise English with international students, joining the Mainland Student Association to socialise with mainland students, Chinese cooking classes to integrate with Hong Kong students, and High Table dinners in the Hall. This allowed them to be more open to socialising with and learning from Hong Kong students, to manage their environment, and to develop study skills and living habits. Second year students were therefore more relaxed.

Interviews with both Groups I and II showed that during their period in Hong Kong, promoting both Putonghua and Chinese culture and increasing communication between Hong Kong and mainland students were very useful.

### **6.4.2    *Adjustments to Studying (SRQ6)***

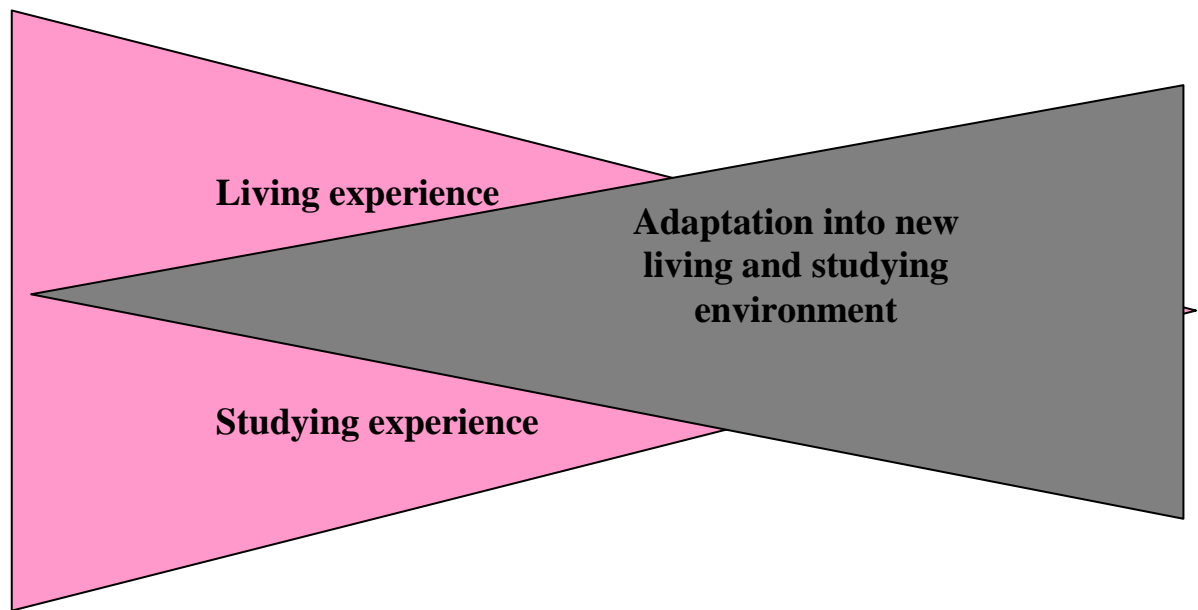
This study found that difficulties also occurred in the study experiences of mainland students in Hong Kong. To face these difficulties successfully, mainland students adapted by overcoming the English language difficulty, getting along with Hong Kong students, finding an efficient method of learning, and using the University support system.

All participants in Groups I and II indicated that English was their greatest difficulty, and that conquering it was the first step to helping them with their studies. They all agreed that study stress was more severe than living stress. All but two indicated that the support offered by the University was very helpful. Two others said that the University provided support for all students, and that mainland students should use these facilities and special classes as much as possible, such as English Enhancement and Cantonese classes for mainland students in the Foundation Year. Contrarily, two believed the University did not and could not do much to help mainland students adjust, as it was more a matter of personality.

The study found that although participants faced numerous challenges in adjusting to living and studying in Hong Kong, they devised various beneficial coping strategies that helped them succeed. With language as the greatest barrier, both in living (Cantonese) and studying (English), they steeped themselves in Hong Kong culture and made connections with Hong Kong students in order to learn from them and get help adjusting. They also took advantage of the programmes offered by the University to make studying and living more manageable.

### **6.4.3    *Comparison with Previous Research***

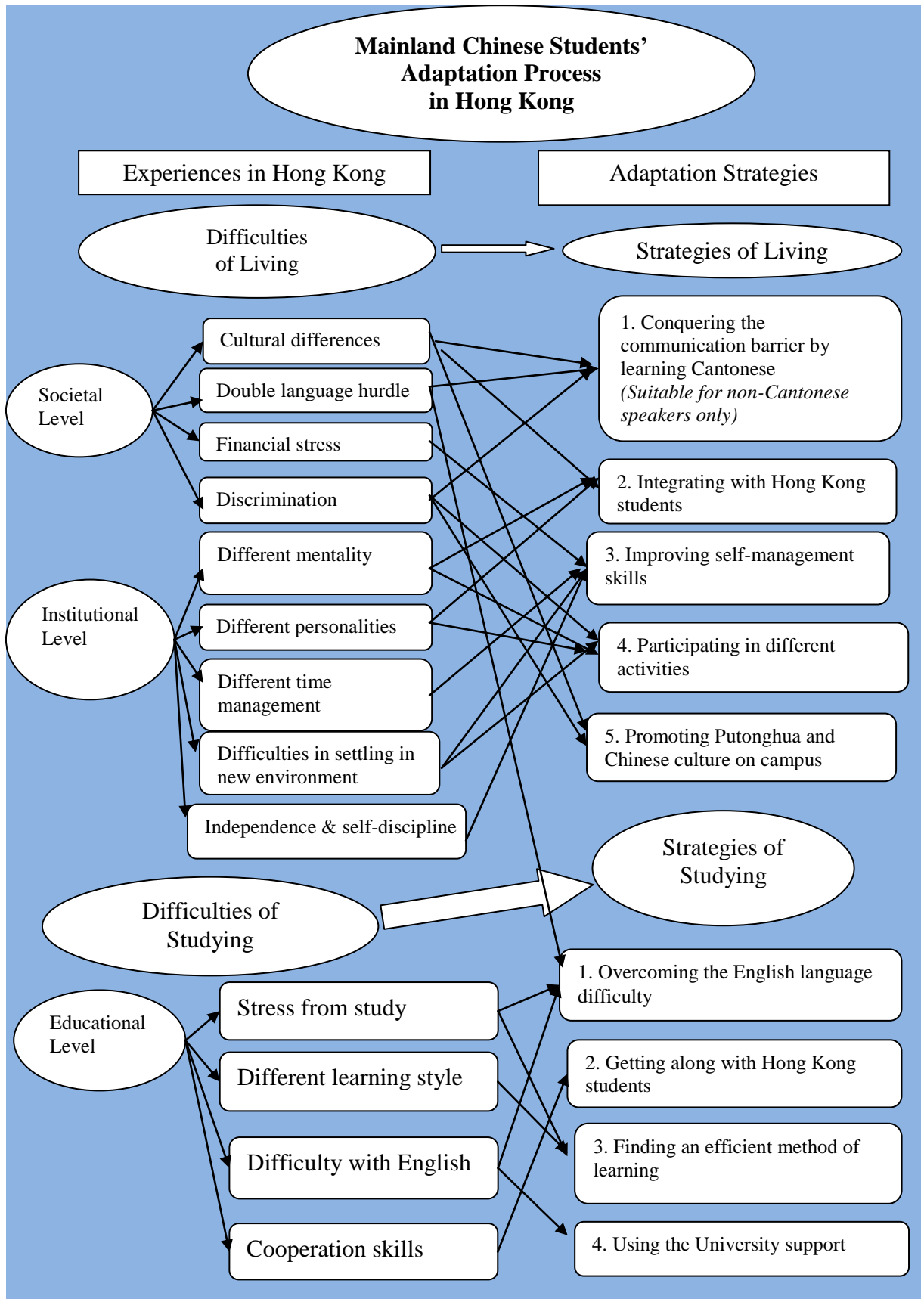
This study found that the previous adaptation strategy models, discussed in Chapter 2, were not wholly applicable to mainland students in Hong Kong. For example, the present study does not agree that the adaptation process should be divided into different stages, as suggested by Lysgaard (1955), Hart (1999), Adler, P. S. (1975) and Adler, N. J. (2002). Rather, it believes that adaptation is a gradual process of emergent development, in which the experiences and strategies are developed in parallel. This process is termed the Emergent Model in this study, as shown in the following Figure 12:



**Figure 12. Emergent Model of Adaptation Strategies Adopted by Mainland Chinese Students in Hong Kong**

This study advocates the Emergent Model, focusing on how the students' experiences affect their strategies of living and studying in Hong Kong and how the strategies help mainland students adjust to the living and studying environment. The model is diagrammatically represented in Fig 12. This is a holistic process based on students' perspectives, including encountering difficulties, and then creating adaptation strategies. It is important to mention that this model is generally applicable to all mainland students in Hong Kong, with the obvious exception that learning Cantonese as a strategy is inapplicable to students from Guangdong whose mother tongue already is Cantonese. The following figure (Figure 13) illustrates the relationships between the experiences and the strategies and the processes of decision-making and adaptation that students go through.





**Figure 13. Processes of Adapting to the New Environment**

This study has contributed new insights in the following ways. First, it suggests that the adaptation strategies of overseas mainland students were built on students' experiences. Second, it indicates that one strategy may address many difficulties. For example, a strategy such as conquering the communication barrier by learning Cantonese is helpful to conquer the cultural difference between Hong Kong students and mainland students, to overcome the double language hurdle, and also to ease discrimination. Third, a particular difficulty may find solutions among a few strategies. Thus, a difficulty such as conquering the cultural differences may be addressed by using a few strategies, such as conquering the communication barrier by learning Cantonese, integrating with Hong Kong students, and promoting Putonghua and Chinese culture on campus to minimise the cultural differences between Hong Kong students and mainland students.

This model is based on the experiences of mainland students in Hong Kong and fits the needs of mainland students. It describes the process of mainland Chinese students adapting to living and studying in Hong Kong. It sets up a theoretical framework for the difficulties mainland students have in Hong Kong and how they establish their strategies to adjust to the environment.

There were four current adaptation strategy models: the U-Curve Model (Lysgaard 1955), the W-Curve Model (Hart 1999), the Five Stage theory (Adler, P. S. 1975), and the Cultural Accommodation Model (Adler, N. J. 2002). Each model has strengths and weaknesses. The four stages of Lysgaard's U-Curve Model shown in Figure 4, developed to plot the adjustment of Norwegian students in the US, was not suitable for this study. First, the Norwegian students needed to study only one language in the US, while mainland students in Hong Kong have a double language hurdle. Second, the Norwegian students faced a completely different culture, but mainland students face a difference in sub-culture which, due to a 150 year separation and the "one country, two system" policy, is admittedly still vast. Finally, the U-Curve Model is more a description of phases of adjustment than a qualitative framework of how and why individuals progress from one stage to the next.

Like the U-Curve Model, Hart's W-Curve Model (1999) in Figure 5 describes four stages of adaptation to a different cultural environment, without attempting to understand why and how the actors experience these stages, or the impact of different environments and interactions on the occurrence and the duration of the stages. It was developed mainly for

expatriate managers and is not applicable to mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong. In particular, the readjustment process upon return is irrelevant, because only three participants expressed a desire to return to the mainland after graduation.

Adler, P.S.'s Five Stage theory (1975) focused on mature expatriates from developed countries working in less developed countries. This model is not suited to the present study for several reasons. First, the students in this study are much younger. Second, the students in this study moved from a less developed to a more developed place. Third, mainland students in Hong Kong did not need to pass through these five stages, but tried to integrate from the beginning, and those who wanted to stay after graduation indicated that they would then try even harder.

The more recent Cultural Accommodation Model (Adler, N. J. 2002) is more helpful, as it focuses on people from less-developed countries staying in developed countries. However, it has limitations. First, Adler, N.J. indicated that a good command of the host country's language is a classic cultural accommodation strategy, but mainland students do not need a good command of the local language, even though it is helpful to speak Cantonese to mix with Hong Kong people, as Putonghua and Cantonese share the same written characters and only differ when spoken; however, mainland students do need a good command of English to study effectively. Second, the model emphasises imitating the host culture and attempting to blend in (Adler, N. J. 2002, p. 126), whereas mainland students try to promote Chinese culture and the Putonghua language on campus, rather than simply imitating the host culture. Third, although widely acclaimed, little empirical work has been done on this model in the field.

In summary, this study adds to the literature in this field and offers a good understanding of the key difficulties encountered by mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong. The study suggests that the success of a strategy can only be interpreted from the actors' perspectives rather than verified against a pre-established pattern. Previous models served only to provide the contextual setup and were mostly irrelevant in this context. The real contribution of this study is to illuminate the students' perspectives on their adaptation. Chen's (1994) analysis of Chinese students in the US found three stages of adaptation: surprise, making sense, and coming to understand the host culture. These findings are similar to the U-Curve Model and the Five Stages theory, and fail to explain how the respondents perceive and overcome the difficulties.

This study suggests that the process of encountering difficulties and finding adaptation strategies takes a long time to achieve and both the experiences and the adaptation strategies come from actors themselves, mainland students themselves in this study. It means that mainland students have encountered difficulties during their stay in Hong Kong relating to both aspects of living and studying, and they need to find solutions to conquer the difficulties. After a certain time and effort of adjustment, mainland students are able to fit in during their time in Hong Kong.

## **6.5 Plans of Mainland Chinese Students after Graduation in Hong Kong**

### **6.5.1 *Summary of Finding (SRQ7)***

This study found three types of post-graduation plans. Three students planned to return to mainland China after working in Hong Kong for seven years to gain permanent residence and working experience; their return would depend on the situation in mainland China at that time and the policy of the Hong Kong government. Four students planned to relocate to another country, such as the US or the UK, to pursue postgraduate studies, while twelve planned to remain in Hong Kong to work or study further.

The study discovered that there were many advantages for mainland students remaining in Hong Kong after graduation. Obtaining permanent residence status was a major reason for eight participants. Other advantages were better living conditions and greater ease in finding a job due to high unemployment in the mainland; obtaining work immediately after graduation to increase access to postgraduate study and scholarships; higher salaries than the mainland; the need in Hong Kong for graduates with mainland backgrounds and Hong Kong higher education and fluency in English, Cantonese, Putonghua; the ability to meet people from different cultures and see different things; and, for those from Guangdong province, the lack of language barrier and the proximity to home.

### **6.5.2 *Comparison with Previous Research***

Ong (2006) found that the plans of mainland Chinese students in Singapore could be summarised by “three Rs”: remain in Singapore, reroute to another country, or return to mainland China (p. 137). The three Rs also apply to mainlanders in Hong Kong, except that most mainland students want to remain in Hong Kong after graduation.

These “three Rs” were confirmed by Li and Bray (2007) in their study of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong and Macau. They found that about 28% of respondents in Hong Kong intended to reroute overseas after graduation and 23% would return to mainland China. Surprisingly, only 2.8% expressed an interest in staying in Hong Kong, while over 45% were undecided and would go wherever they could find better opportunities for personal development (Li & Bray 2007, p. 812). In the present study, 63% (twelve out of nineteen participants) would choose to remain in Hong Kong, 21% (four participants) to reroute to another country and only 16% (three participants) to return to the mainland.

Conflicting reports in the literature and the mass media are confusing rather than clarifying. Lam (2006) reported that most mainland students in Hong Kong remain after graduation, as shown in Figure 6. The popular view in Hong Kong is that the majority of mainland Chinese students studying there will stay, and James Yetman (2007) has argued that the number of mainland students studying in Hong Kong has recently sky-rocketed, especially in Business disciplines. This study confirms these trends, but contradicts Li and Bray's findings that very few students (2.8%) wanted to remain in Hong Kong. The trends identified by Li and Bray (2007) are not consistent with the official publications of Hong Kong universities or the general perception, as discussed in Chapter 2. For example, the Annual Report of the University (2006) shows that 90% of mainland Chinese students intended to stay in Hong Kong either to study further or seek employment. The present study shows that Li and Bray's 2.8% figure and the University's 90% figure are at the extreme ends, but that the majority of mainland students want to remain in Hong Kong.

Chapter 2 raised the question of why mainland Chinese students were not discouraged to remain in Hong Kong after their graduation, even though very few mainland graduates had been successful before 2008. This was due to fierce job market competition and mainland students needing to compete with Hong Kong students for jobs in Hong Kong companies (South China Morning Post, April 30, 2007). Unfortunately, previous research provides little information on why students chose to study in Hong Kong. This study answers the question by presenting the advantages for mainland students of remaining in Hong Kong, vis-à-vis going overseas or returning to mainland China. The current study not only looks into the plans of mainland Chinese students after graduation, but also describes their future strategies if they remain in Hong Kong. Moreover, the study focuses

closely on their challenges and obstacles and explains why mainland students go to Hong Kong despite the difficulties, and how they overcome these difficulties. To date these points have not been discussed by other researchers, and therefore constitute a major contribution to the literature.

## **6.6 Summary**

This chapter has followed the framework and the general structure of the four Research Questions and seven Specific Research Questions and discussed all of them with a critical approach. The chapter has discussed the results and findings generated from the study and compared them with the previous literature, therefore the similarities and differences between the current research and the previous research were found and discussed. It is not limited to comparing the findings with the previous literature but also shows how it builds on and develops the literature with a critical approach. At the same time it discussed the reliability and robustness of these findings and the research method adopted.

In differing from previous research, this study created an Emergent Model to illustrate the process of iteratively encountering difficulties and finding adaptation strategies to conquer the difficulties. This study suggests that this process is a long-term, gradual one and both the experiences and adaptation strategies are based on actors' perspectives and come directly from the actors themselves. Mainland students encounter difficulties living and studying in Hong Kong, and they look for solutions to these difficulties.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.1 Introduction

The purposes of this research are first, to investigate the reasons why mainland Chinese students choose Hong Kong for their higher education; second, to understand the experiences that mainland Chinese students have while they study and live in Hong Kong; third, to reveal the range of strategies they adopt to ensure successful adaptation; and finally, to elicit the future plans of the students after graduation in Hong Kong.

This chapter is comprised of four sections. First, it provides a summary of main findings regarding mainland Chinese students studying and living in Hong Kong. Second, it discusses the contribution, generalisability and limitations of this study in comparison with the previous literature. Third, it illustrates the study's theoretical and practical implications. Last, it offers recommendations for future research, mainland students who plan to study in Hong Kong, higher education policy makers in Hong Kong, and Higher Education Institutions hosting mainland students in the future.

This project contributes to the emerging research tradition of comparative cross-cultural studies by addressing the following **four** Research Questions and **seven** Specific Research Questions. The following section summarises the findings of these Research Questions and Specific Research Questions.

#### 7.2 Summary of the Study

There are **four** Research Questions (RQ) subdivided into **seven** Specific Research Questions (SRQ), which provide the framework for this thesis. This section summarises the findings regarding the Research Questions and Specific Questions.

**(RQ1) Why do mainland Chinese students choose Hong Kong for their higher education?**

Research Question 1 has been fractured into the Specific Research Questions SRQ1 and SRQ2 together with the findings:

**SRQ 1 Why do mainland Chinese students opt to study overseas rather than stay in China for their higher education?**

Based on the discussions in Chapters 4 and 6, data analysis shows that mainland students opt to pursue higher education overseas because of the adverse contextual situation of China as well as favourable overseas conditions. Students rationally compare the relative advantages of studying in China and overseas before making their decision. The factors considered involve societal, economic and educational factors from both push-pull and internal-external directions.

**SRQ 2 What are the reasons for mainland Chinese students choosing Hong Kong for their higher education rather than elsewhere overseas?**

As illustrated in section 4.4, mainland students choose to study in Hong Kong not only because of the social and economic situations of the mainland and Hong Kong, but also individual needs and family situations. From an economic aspect, Hong Kong is affordable and culturally it is a bridge between the East and the West. From the educational aspects, it has more advanced teaching and learning resources than the mainland, and offers opportunities to improve English language skills. Hong Kong is also in reasonable proximity to the mainland, which allows students to visit their families while beginning their higher education.

**(RQ2) What experiences do mainland Chinese students have while living and studying in Hong Kong?**

To answer the Research Question 2, the following are the Specific Research Questions SRQ3 and SRQ4 together with their findings:

**SRQ 3 What are the living experiences of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong?**

The interview data revealed several challenges facing mainland Chinese students while living and studying in Hong Kong. These challenges fall into four categories: financial burdens, double language barriers, teaching/learning differences and cultural barriers. The financial burdens are stressful, particularly for the students who are self-financed. Those who are not self-financed feel not only the financial pressure, as Hong Kong is an



expensive city and their scholarship only covers tuition and minimum living expenses, but also the added stress of needing to perform well academically or losing their scholarship. In addition, mainland students would like to find part-time work in Hong Kong to help handle living expenses but also to facilitate socialising and to prepare them to find a job after graduating. However, they are at a disadvantage due to language hurdles in the workplace and in Hong Kong society in general. Cantonese is used on a daily basis in Hong Kong although Putonghua is used more often in communication with mainland Chinese, and English is a teaching and working language as discussed in Chapter 2. Thus, it is very helpful if students are fluent in three languages: Cantonese, Putonghua and English.

The cultural barriers are significant. The students have to face differences in attitudes, relationships, traditions, customs, and even learning/teaching approaches. They also feel socially isolated from their own culture, alienated by lack of resources, and limited in their ability to make social connections within Hong Kong.

All fifteen participants in Group I and Group II indicated that they had difficulty studying and living in Hong Kong. These difficulties were societal, institutional and educational. The cultural and environmental differences between Hong Kong and the mainland are the most prominent difficulties. At a societal level difficulties involve cultural differences, double language hurdles, financial stress, and discrimination; at the institutional level, they involve different mentalities, interests, personalities, time management habits, and approaches to independence and self-discipline.

**SRQ 4 What are the studying experiences of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong?**

This study reveals that living experiences impact education in many ways, but the latter also brings independent challenges. This study finds that the difficulties relating to studying fall into five categories: stress, different learning style, difficulty with English, cooperation skills and different teaching style.

**(RQ3) How do mainland Chinese students adapt to living and studying in Hong Kong?**

Research Question 3 is broken into the Specific Research Questions SRQ5 and SRQ6, each of which is addressed below:

**SRQ 5 In what ways do mainland Chinese students adapt to living in Hong Kong?**

Facing the difficulties of living in Hong Kong, mainland Chinese students adopt a range of different strategies, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, including learning Cantonese, integrating with Hong Kong students, improving self-management skills, participating in activities, and promoting Putonghua and Chinese culture on campus.

This study indicates that the focus of the first-year students is different from that of the second-year students regarding both living and studying. During the first year, it is important to focus on learning the language and adjusting to being independent. By the time they reach their second year, the students are more confident about developing closer relationships with the Hong Kong students. They participate in more organisations and activities, which allows them to socialise with and learn from Hong Kong students regarding managing their environment and developing study skills. The second-year students are therefore more relaxed, but they start to worry more about their future plans after graduation.

**SRQ 6 In what ways do mainland Chinese students adapt to studying in Hong Kong?**

In regard to study difficulties, mainland Chinese students adopted strategies that include learning English, socialising with Hong Kong students, finding an efficient method of learning, and using the support from the University. In summary, although the participants faced numerous challenges in adjusting to living and studying in Hong Kong, they devised strategies that helped them succeed. With language as the biggest barrier, they steeped themselves in the culture and made connections with Hong Kong students which helped them to adjust to settling in Hong Kong and they took advantage of university programmes designed to make both their living and studying more manageable.

**(RQ4) What future plans, if any, do the mainland Chinese students have after graduation in Hong Kong?**

In order to answer Research Question 4, the following Specific Research Question was posed:

**SRQ 7 What plans do mainland Chinese students have after graduation in Hong Kong?**

Based on the face-to-face interviews with nineteen students, mainland students have three types of plans after graduating in Hong Kong: 1) return to mainland China, 2) relocate to another country, and 3) remain in Hong Kong. Thirteen out of nineteen participants indicated that they preferred to remain in Hong Kong for work or further study.

Remaining in Hong Kong after graduation would provide numerous advantages for mainland students: 1) the ability to obtain permanent residence status after seven years in Hong Kong; 2) job availability in Hong Kong; 3) mainland students could more easily continue with postgraduate studies since most Hong Kong students wanted to enter the workforce after their undergraduate studies rather than continue on to postgraduate studies; 4) Hong Kong's unemployment rate is lower and the competition among university graduates is less fierce than in mainland China; 5) as Hong Kong is an international city, it is easy to travel, meet different people and gain wider experience of the world.

### **7.3 Contribution, Generalisability and Limitations of the Study**

#### **7.3.1 *Contribution of the Study***

This small study found the new trend of mainland students going to Hong Kong, the majority of them are self-financed. This is contrary to Li and Bray's study (2007) which researched mainland students in Hong Kong and Macau, mostly sponsored by scholarships. According to the findings of this study, sixteen of nineteen participants interviewed were self-financed, which means they were sponsored by their families. This sample is too small to draw any generalisations, but it may indicate a new trend of more self-financed mainland students going to Hong Kong in the last two years. There is a need for a larger sample to investigate this.

The study generates an Emergent Model to describe the experiences and adaptation strategies of mainland students in Hong Kong. A strength of the model is its grounding in students' perspectives of their experiences and decision-making strategies as they adapt to living and studying in Hong Kong over time.

Although this study is not generalisable, its findings can serve as a useful reference for other mainland students or policy makers of Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions. The value of this study lies in the fact that the findings can enable readers to better understand the situation of mainland students in Hong Kong, encourage the policy makers in the Hong Kong government and institutions to consider mainland students' needs when issuing new policies, and make Hong Kong society better prepared to accept integration of mainland students and develop a more empathetic approach to the challenges they face.

### **7.3.2 *Generalisability***

This study does not claim its findings to be generalisable in the same way that quantitative researchers would claim. The very small sample of this study and the large and rapid flow of mainland students in recent years to many countries make it impossible to generalise the findings of this study. The study instead has set out to present an analytical and critical approach with in-depth data gathering based on a sample of nineteen mainland students in one Hong Kong university, named in this research as "The University". In this study, each case is studied in context and understood in its complexity and entirety following Punch's theory (2005, p. 154) as it relates to the research questions. Therefore, the findings are meant to contribute toward understanding the range of experiences of a cohort of mainland students in Hong Kong. In this sense, the study may be said to contribute towards theory building on this phenomenon.

This study used a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. "Transferability," instead of "generalisability," as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is a more suitable term to describe the study's research implications. Data were collected using the students as cases, and aimed to offer a detailed understanding from which theory might be developed or modified (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p.28). However, the researcher does believe that the theoretical concepts generated from the data may be "transferable" and thus, people working in other Higher Education Institutions in Hong Kong can use the

findings to understand the situation of mainland students in Hong Kong. Wolcott (1995) argues that each case study is unique, but not so unique that others cannot learn from it. In this regard, the responsibility for generalisation falls on the reader or “consumer” rather than on the researcher; the researcher of this study believes that it is the user’s responsibility to decide whether the findings are applicable to his/her own situation. The researcher’s obligation is to provide an extensive description of the participants, setting and context, so that the reader can compare his/her situation with that of the case (Dimmock and O’Donoghue, 1996).

### ***7.3.3 Limitations of the Study***

This study was confined to one university from a total of eight in Hong Kong. It thus does not aim to speak for the situations of mainland students in other Hong Kong universities or in other countries.

Second, this study did not cover a wider range of mainland students, as sampling was limited to nineteen students. Although the researcher tried to use a maximum variation sampling, it was not possible to cover all the departments that host mainland students in the case university.

Third, as the number of interview participants was limited to first- and second-year mainland students, this study did not look into the situations of mainland postgraduates, visiting scholars, researchers, students who were working or studying in Hong Kong only for a short period of time, or higher level teaching staff such as professors who originally came from the mainland.

Fourth, this study did not research whether female and male mainland students have different difficulties or means of coping with their living and studying in Hong Kong as well as their future plans, although the sampling included both males and females.

Fifth, data collection for Research Questions 2 and 3 was done in 2006-2007 and did not include recent events and policies. Since 2006, the Hong Kong government has changed the policy towards mainland students and increased its intake of mainland students in many fields. Since 2009, mainland students can have work permits which entitle them to work legally in Hong Kong. Due to the recent events and new government policies,

mainland students may have eased some of the previous difficulties regarding their stay in Hong Kong. One example of such a change is that financial stress might be eased as mainland students can now apply for work permits to work in Hong Kong. Working may, however, lead to further problems, such as difficulties of managing their study and work at the same time while in Hong Kong.

Many other departments of the University, such as Rehabilitation and Optometry, have also started to recruit mainland students since this study was carried out, but intake of mainland students is still very limited in these departments. Further study might focus on whether mainland students in these departments meet the same difficulties as those in other departments researched in this study, such as Department of Logistics or Department of Biology. Another research angle would be to study whether students from different departments have different strategies towards living and studying in Hong Kong.

## **7.4 Implications**

### **7.4.1 *Implications of the Research Findings for Theory***

Regarding Bottery's hypothesis of the "cultural flattening hypothesis", this study suggests more discussion is needed to illustrate the impact of globalisation on the education system. Data from this study both support and disagree with this argument. First, the findings of this study show that globalisation is helping to blend and merge different cultures in some ways, such as mainland students experiencing international and Cantonese food and listening to a different form of Chinese music. Second, data show mainland students have difficulty settling into another Chinese culture (Hong Kong) due to the cultural differences between the mainland and Hong Kong dispositions, norms and values, such as differences in personality, attitudes, relationships, traditions, customs and learning/teaching approaches, as discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6 of this study.

The data suggest that other than global forces in the educational system, there are other personal attributes of adaptability and flexibility, such as family background, personality, language ability and willingness to be open and to learn in a new environment. A good adaptation in a different cultural environment depends on from where and to where a student is going to study. One example is students from Guangdong Province find it

easier to adjust to living in Hong Kong than students from northern China. However, on study aspects, students from Guangdong province do not find it any easier to adjust than students from northern China. Another example is that students with a more open and optimistic personality, such as II-ST1, II-ST7, II-ST8, find it easier to integrate in Hong Kong society and to mix with Hong Kong students than those with less easy going and more reticent personalities. The conclusion of this study, bearing in mind the evidence base of a small number of students, is that in some respects the cultural influences between the mainland and Hong Kong students are flattening out due to globalisation, and the increased communication between the mainland and Hong Kong, but there are still significant cultural barriers between them that prevent easy assimilation. This is to bear in mind both groups of students – from Hong Kong and the mainland – are Chinese in ethnicity and indeed, most Hong Kong people are mainland migrants – either first, second or third generation.

In regard to studying, it seems reasonable to suggest that the University should not consider students' general GPA in the Foundation Year to decide whether the students be de-registered (or not) later in the degree. The current rule of the University requires that the students be deregistered and sent home if their GPAs are below 2.0 for two terms. It is suggested that the GPA of the Foundation Year for mainland students should not be included in the general GPA in order to judge whether students performed well as the courses in the Foundation Year are not part of the Degree Programme study. Instead these courses are only preparatory courses such as English, Math and Chinese culture. They are not directly linked to the overall Degree Programmes. Due to the different educational systems of the secondary school in Hong Kong and in the mainland, students from the mainland only study six years of secondary study instead of seven years for Hong Kong students. Therefore mainland students need to do one year of preparation courses, called the Foundation Year, in the university, but Hong Kong students do not do the Foundation Year. Participants in this study, such as II-ST2 and II-ST6, stated that the rule of de-registration was not told to them before they arrived in Hong Kong. They believe the University should have told them of the rule before they came to Hong Kong. The University could also add some bridging courses in the Foundation Year to prepare mainland students for the Degree Programmes. The current situation is that the courses they learned in the Foundation Year were not related to their Degree Programmes at all.

The University should establish better communication between teachers and students, and between the University and students. One example is that mainland students do not like to speak up for themselves to the University, the department or the teachers about their needs. Mainland students could better adapt to the studying environment of Hong Kong if the University arranged more communication opportunities between students and teachers, or between the University and the mainland students. Currently, the teacher-student ratio is one teacher to 50 students. Mainland students do not have much opportunity to talk to the teachers, according to I-ST1. II-ST6 from the Department of Marketing explained that mainland students paid a higher tuition fee than Hong Kong students, but didn't get the support from the University, stating: "We need more attention from the University."

Although the Hong Kong government and Higher Education Institutions have done much to support mainland students, such as facilitating the visa application procedure and providing a dormitory on campus, there are still some more supportive strategies that mainland students feel Hong Kong society and Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions could do, such as improve communication between Hong Kong students and mainland students. Hong Kong University authorities need a better understanding of mainland students, and the University should realise that the mainland students' needs are different from those of Hong Kong students due to differences in cultural background, languages, and values. One typical example is they often feel lonely and isolated as they do not have family members around them, and many of them have left home for the first time. This situation could lead many of them to feel depressed and suffer low morale in study. If the University can organise activities during the weekend for them, they might feel less lonely and isolated.

#### **7.4.2    *Implications of the Research Findings for Practice***

The study advocates that better preparation and collaboration among the Hong Kong Government, the Higher Education Institutions and mainland students are needed to help prepare mainland students for their arrival in Hong Kong. Mainland students asked during the interviews for their recommendations to be passed on to Hong Kong society, Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions and to those who recruit and teach mainland students. The implications of the research findings for practice are addressed principally to two



levels: higher education policy makers in Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions that host mainland students. As shown in this study, the Hong Kong Higher Education Institution policy makers and Higher Education Institutions should consider mainland students' needs in general, and especially consider mainland students' needs for studying. Based on interviews with fifteen participants in Group I and Group II, this study recommends that Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions and possibly the society as a whole need a better understanding of mainland students' needs.

In regard to living and studying, the University should consider both Hong Kong students' and mainland students' needs in Higher Education. One example is that the Students' Canteen could adapt to include food more suited to the tastes of mainland students. Most mainland students come from Non-Cantonese regions and they are not used to Cantonese food. Therefore in the interviews, participants from other non-Cantonese regions, such as I-ST3, I-ST7, II-ST5, II-ST7, found that they had difficulty adjusting to the food and living habits in Hong Kong. This study suggests that the University should review their Canteens and offer food to fit different tastes and at different levels of prices.

A further example of adaptation needed concerns internships during the three year undergraduate study in Hong Kong. At the moment of conducting this study, most opportunities for doing internships are located in the mainland, except for a small number of placements in America, Europe and Australia. However, mainland students do not wish to do their internships in their homeland, as they are already familiar with the environment. Rather they wish to seek overseas experience and opportunity to explore a wider world and to seek more opportunities of contact with other places than the mainland, such as Europe and America. This would also help them plan their futures after graduation. Participants (I-ST1, II-ST4) in this study indicated that most of the places for internship in America and Europe were taken by Hong Kong students and that the mainland students could only choose among places in Hong Kong and in the mainland. They felt there was a case for improvement.

The University should design English courses to help mainland students improve their English ability, especially speaking and writing. Mainland students do not need courses to improve English grammar; their weakness is language performing skills, that is, speaking and writing English rather than receptive skills such as listening and reading. Mainland

students normally understand better than they express themselves and read English books better than they write English. Designing English courses to fit their needs would allow mainland students to do well in class presentations and assignments, and keep up with their classes.

The University could clearly inform mainland students regarding which department or office is responsible for their welfare. AECO (Academic Exchange and Collaboration Office, now is named as International Affairs Office) used to provide support to mainland students in the Foundation Year, but in their second year, this responsibility was turned over to the students' respective academic departments, which are mainly in charge of students' programme arrangements rather than their overall development. The Mainland Students Association, while not recognised widely and officially, did provide a lot of practical support to the mainland students whenever they had difficulties. The University should also provide more information to mainland students about studying in their department or in their subjects. Departments could invite senior students to provide advice and mentorship. Overall, the university needs to make more effort to help connect the mainland students with the University, especially providing news and information about what is happening in the University.

The findings of this study may also be useful for analysing the situation of mainland students who are studying in other countries such as Macau, Singapore, or South Korea. While much research has been done on the mainland students who are studying in large countries like the US, the UK, Canada, or Australia, very little research has been done on those who are studying in small countries like Macau, Singapore, South Korea, South Africa, or countries in Latin America or Africa.

## 7.5 Recommendations

From the data collected through the interviews, the study has generated a few recommendations. These recommendations can be divided into **four** categories: recommendations regarding future research; recommendations for mainland students; recommendations for higher education policy makers in Hong Kong; and recommendations to Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions hosting mainland students.

### 7.5.1 *Recommendations for Further Research*

First, further research might focus on other groups, such as postgraduate mainland students, mainland heads of department, mainland professors working in Hong Kong, or visiting scholars from the mainland working in Hong Kong. The present researcher believes that there are diverse groups of mainland students in Hong Kong in the other seven universities and their number is significant. It is important to capture their experiences and their stories of success in Hong Kong. Second, further research might be done on mainland students studying in departments, such as Optometry, Hotel and Tourism. They were not previously open to mainland students but that have now started to recruit more mainland students.

Further research might also look at those mainland students who graduated from Hong Kong and are now working there. With their Hong Kong education, a number of studies might be done. Examples are:

1. How proficient are they in the three languages - Cantonese, Putonghua and English?
2. How well have they fitted into and been accepted by Hong Kong society?
3. What contribution do they make to the Hong Kong economy?

Their contribution is significant to the further development of Hong Kong, which continuously aims to be an international city and financial centre of Asia. Study of these phenomena can form an important research agenda, which would be worthy of extended attention in future studies. In addition, important research is needed on those mainland students who are sent back due to their failure to meet the GPA requirement, and those who had great difficulty fitting in with Hong Kong society and its educational system. It

is also meaningful to find out why and how they failed to study successfully in Hong Kong and what lessons can be learnt for future mainland students to avoid the same mistakes in future. A Chinese proverb says that failure in the past is the source of success in the future. Hopefully future mainland students can generate experiences from previous students and do better than their predecessors.

More research can also be carried on how Hong Kong students see this new phenomenon of the increased number of mainland students going to Hong Kong for the higher education. As they share the same learning and teaching environment and university facilities, the Hong Kong students' perspectives can encourage further development of better policy to integrate mainland students in the Hong Kong new living and studying environment.

### **7.5.2      *Recommendations for Mainland Students***

Based on the interviews with nineteen participants, this study generated numerous strategies adopted by mainland students to conquer the difficulties of studying and living in Hong Kong. There are other measures that mainland students can take to prepare themselves better before going to Hong Kong:

- 1) It is a good idea to establish a Buddy System to allow new students to seek information from senior mainland students about living and studying in Hong Kong. Senior students know the situation in Hong Kong fairly well as they have been in Hong Kong for a longer time than the newcomers and their insight is very valuable for the new students. This can help new students avoid making similar mistakes or feel powerless when they have difficulties.
- 2) Mentoring System between senior and junior students can also be helpful as each department has its own culture and approach to learning, such as in the Marketing and Management Department, students are encouraged to participate in team work and group presentation, while students in the departments of science and engineering, such as Biology and Electrical Engineering, need to do more individual laboratory work (of course they need to do team work as well sometimes) or go to the library to search information on their own. This kind of subject-related learning method is important for the new students to be aware of. If new students can seek help from senior students, they can learn reliable study methods and better prepare for exams. The

senior students have first hand information about studying in their department and mainland students feel comfortable discussing this issue among them.

- 3) Before departing from home, mainland students should contact other mainland students who are studying in Hong Kong and receive information from them about how to prepare for their arrival. They could also get the names and contact information of other new students who are going to Hong Kong from the same city, so they can arrange their trip together. In this way they can build friendships and perhaps become study partners when they arrive in the Hong Kong universities.
- 4) Appointing a student in each department as a link for mainland students with the department or the University. There are some university organisations, such as the Mainland Student Association, Putonghua Club, and Exchange Students Office, which can offer help whenever there is a need. The current situation is the new mainland students are not aware of these organisations and therefore they do not know where to seek help. In Hong Kong institutions at present, there is not an appointed teacher or a student who is in charge of linking mainland students with the university, so students need to seek information on their own or look for staff or members of these organisations.

### **7.5.3    *Recommendations for Higher Education Policy Makers in Hong Kong***

Information about societal cultures and differences should be given to mainland students before their arrival in Hong Kong. Some students expressed their anxiety about not knowing much about Hong Kong or the University before their arrival in Hong Kong. If the Hong Kong government or the university could provide more information about Hong Kong and the universities, it would give students a clearer picture about living and studying in Hong Kong. Each year when staff from Hong Kong universities go to the mainland to recruit students, they should provide more detailed information, such as brochures, books, programme presentations to interested candidates. They also need to indicate important information about what is the meaning of GPA and what is the importance of gaining a high GPA and what are the consequences of not maintaining a satisfactory GPA, as indicated in the Students' Handbook.

At an institutional level, universities should provide more information about themselves and the departments, including clear information about their services, academic requirements and facilities. It is essential that this information be given earlier to mainland students before their arrival in Hong Kong and prior to the start of their study by mail or by sending emails.

Pamphlets and brochures about activities in University should be mailed to mainland students while they are preparing for their enrolment in Hong Kong. Once they arrive, they would then know what activities they could attend while in Hong Kong. Participating in activities on campus is very important in order to get to know people and be aware of what is going on in the University; otherwise mainland students might feel isolated due to the new living and studying environment and language barriers.

#### ***7.5.4 Recommendations to Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions Hosting Mainland Students***

One way to promote the settling in process for mainland students is to allow them to start in Hong Kong earlier than the beginning of the term so that they can be better prepared for their studies. For example, O-Camp (Orientation Camp) is an activity to welcome new students on campus and it is also a good opportunity to meet other students from Hong Kong, the mainland or other countries. This activity is organised each year in August prior to the new term. Those who do not participate in O-Camp are seen as outsiders.

It would be a good idea if the University linked new mainland students with more senior mainland students who have been in Hong Kong for a while. Given relevant information about Hong Kong and the University beforehand, students would be better prepared and less confused as they embark on their studies. The University could arrange for mainland students to receive new mainland students at the University when the newcomers arrive in Hong Kong. The University recently asked some senior mainland students to receive new students at a ratio of one senior student to four to five new students; if the University could arrange one-to-one help between one senior mainland student and a newcomer, the support would be even greater. The University should give full support and official recognition to the mainland Students Association (MSA) and list it on the university directory.

The University can also offer the joint scholarships together with PRC Ministry of Education to provide financial support to the mainland students, as China is becoming richer and more powerful. The mainland government should also provide scholarships to mainland students as it now has a stronger financial footing. The current situation is that most scholarships are only available to Hong Kong residents and only provided by the Hong Kong government, and mainland students are not allowed to apply for most of these scholarships. If the Central government could provide scholarships to enable their students to receive a good education in Hong Kong, its contribution and the result of its contribution would be fruitful.

The University should promote Putonghua more and encourage Hong Kong students to speak Putonghua with mainland students. The University should set up a Putonghua programme (similar to Big Mouth for promoting English) as many students would be interested in this kind of programme and the attitude of Hong Kong students towards mainland students would become more positive. The office in charge of the mainland students in the University should organise more activities to involve both mainland and Hong Kong students, such as BBQs, excursions, and karaoke. This would help increase the communication and mutual understanding between mainland and Hong Kong students, helping them to integrate within the University. The only activities currently offered are those in which mainland students get together with other mainland students instead of mainland students with Hong Kong students.

The University should provide sufficient supply of accommodation for non-local students. The most urgent problem facing non-local students is that there is not sufficient student housing provided by the University (Singtao Daily, October 4, 2007), and the insufficient housing for overseas students contributes to the uncertainty, anxiety and stress. Even though the University has made an effort to facilitate accommodation for non-local students, such as providing the Hall and finding a place in YMCA, Mongkok which is about half hour away from the University, more could be done on this. It is a good idea for the University to rent nearby apartments, such as Harbour Place in Hung Hom, for students' use, only 5 minutes walking to the University. This can help overseas students feel more secure, less anxious when they newly arrived in Hong Kong.

## **7.6 Epilogue**

This study has addressed all the Research Questions and Specific Research Questions, thus providing data on why mainland students opt to study overseas and in particular, why they choose Hong Kong for their studies, and how they adapt to living and studying once in Hong Kong. The study also contributes to the literature on the topic by clarifying the difficulties mainland students encounter in Hong Kong and their range of strategies to overcome these difficulties. Furthermore, it discusses the future plans of mainland students after their graduation.

While this study does not aim to be generalisable, the in-depth descriptions regarding why mainland students go to Hong Kong, their living and academic situations in Hong Kong, their strategies to overcome difficulties and how they prepare for their futures, have implications for those who are interested in helping mainland students, those who intend to study in Hong Kong, and those who will soon graduate from Hong Kong universities and are hesitating about what to do next. In particular, the researcher would advocate more empathy for mainland students, as they need the strong support from Hong Kong society and its Higher Education Institutions if they are to further their careers and integrate and contribute to society in a meaningful way.



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